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Friar Tuck

Robert Alexander Wason

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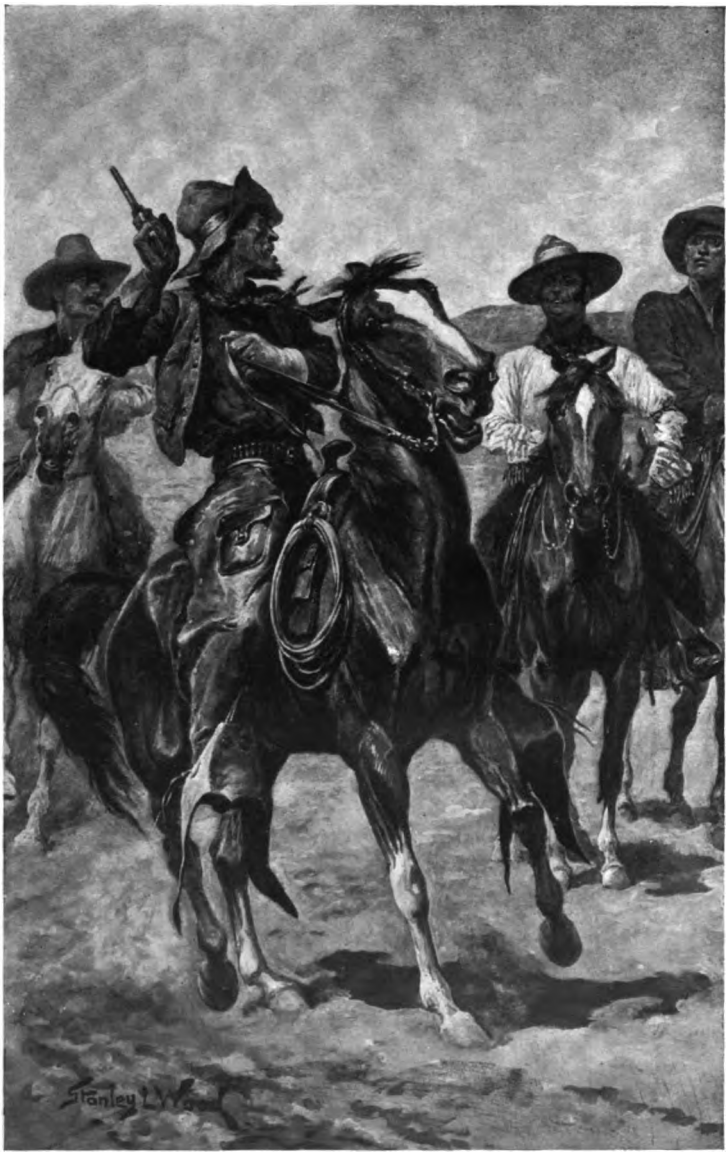

He shot his hand across an' pulled his gun quick as a flash; but Horace didn't move, he just sat still, with a friendly smile on his face

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FRONTISPIECE. *See page 223*

FRIAR TUCK

BEING THE CHRONICLES OF THE REVEREND JOHN CARMICHAEL, OF WYOMING, U.S.A., AS SET FORTH AND EMBELLISHED BY HIS FRIEND AND ADMIRER

HAPPY HAWKINS

AND HERE RECORDED BY

ROBERT ALEXANDER WASON

AUTHOR OF "HAPPY HAWKINS," "THE KNIGHT-ERRANT" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

STANLEY L. WOOD

BOSTON

SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY

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MANY there are who respond to the commonplace, monotonous call of Duty, and year after year uncomplainingly spend their lives on the treadmill of Routine; but who still feel in their hearts the call of the open road, the music of the stars, the wine of the western wind, and the thrilling abandon of a mad gallop out beyond speed limits and grass signs to where life has ceased to be a series of cogs and—a man is still a man.

To the members of this fraternity, whose emblem, hidden behind deep and steadfast eyes, is often missed by man, but always recognized by dogs and horses, I dedicate this book, in the hope that for an hour or two it may lift the pressure a little.

R. A. W.

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JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME

REVIEWS are not infrequently colored by a temporary elevation of the critic's mind (or a temporary depression of the critic's liver), advertisements are not invariably free from bias; so, perhaps, a few words of friendly warning will not be considered impertinent.

Whosoever is squeamishly sensitive as to the formal technique of literary construction will save himself positive irritation by avoiding this book. It is a told, rather than a written story; and this is a compromise which defies Art and frankly turns to the more elastic methods of Nature.

It is supposed to be told by an outdoor man in those delightful moments of relaxation when the restraint of self-consciousness is dropped, and the spirit flows forth with a freedom difficult to find, outside the egoism of childhood. This general suggestion is easily tossed out; but the reader must supply the details — the night camps with the pipes sending up incense about the tiny fires, the winter evenings when the still cold lurks at the threshold or the blizzard howls around the log corners; or those still more elusive moments when the riding man shifts his weight to a single thigh, and tells the inner story which has been rising from his open heart to his closed lips for many a long mile.

Nor will these details suffice to complete the atmosphere in which, bit by bit, the story is told. The greatest charm in the told story comes direct from the teller; and, toil as we will over printed pages, they obstinately refuse to reproduce the twinkle of bright, deep-set eyes, the whimsical twist

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which gives character to a commonplace word, the subtile modulations of a mellow voice, the discriminating accent which makes a sentence fire when spoken, and only ashes when written; or, hardest of all, those eloquent pauses and illuminating gestures which convey a climax neither tongue nor pen dare attempt.

Happy Hawkins is complex, but the basic foundation of his character is simplicity. His audience is usually a mixed one, men of the range and an Easterner or two, fortunate enough to find the way into his confidence. Occasionally he amuses himself by talking to the one group over the heads of the other; but even then, his own simplicity is but thinly veiled. The phases of life which he holds lightly are exploited with riotous recklessness; but whoever would visit his private shrines must tread with reverent step.

His exaggerations are not to deceive, but to magnify — an adjunct to expression invariably found among primitive people. A brass monkey is really not sensitive to variations of temperature; and yet, even among the civilized, a peculiarly vivid impression is conveyed by stating that a particular cold snap has had a disintegrating effect upon the integrity of a brass monkey. There is a philosophy of exaggeration which is no kin to falsehood.

Happy has an eager, hungry, active mind, a mind worthy of careful cultivation; but forced by circumstances to gather its nourishment along lines similar to those adopted by the meek and lowly sponge. A sponge is earnest, patient, and industrious; but, fixed to a submerged stone as it is, it is hampered by limitations which no amount of personal ambition is quite able to overcome. As Happy himself was fond of saying: "The thing 'at sets most strangers again each other, is the fact that each insists on judgin' every-

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thing from his own standpoint. A cow-puncher gets the idee that because an Eastener can't sit comfortable on a bronco when it 's sunfishin' or twistin' ends, he jes nachely ain't fit to clutter up the surface o' the earth; while the Eastener is inclined to estimate the puncher an' his pony as bein' on the same intellectual level. If they 'd just open up an' examine each other impartial, they 'd mighty soon see 'at the difference in 'em came from what they did, instead o' the choice o' their lines o' business dependin' on their natural make-up. I once had a no-account pinto which refused to squat back on the rope, and I rejoiced exceeding when I got seventy-five bucks for him; but the feller I took advantage of clipped his mane, docked his tail, introduced him into swell-society, and got three hundred for him as a polo pony; which all goes to show —" (The finish of this is an expansive wave of the hand, a tilt of the head to the right, and an indescribably droll expression.)

The above is a fair sample of the leisurely way in which Happy Hawkins tells a story. This is not the proper way to tell a story. A story should travel an air-line and not stop at the smaller stations, while Happy prefers to take his bed along on a spare horse and camp out wherever the mood strikes him. The reader who delights in a story which speeds along like a limited, will probably be disappointed in this book; while, on the other hand, the reader who enjoys the intimate association which is lighted with the evening camp fire, runs a risk of finding some relaxation in taking another little trip with Happy Hawkins.

R. A. W.

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CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	The Meeting	1
II	The Bettin' Barber o' Boggs	15
III	Above the Dust	34
IV	Ty Jones	41
V	The Hold-Up	49
VI	A Reminiscence	57
VII	Horace Walpole Bradford	66
VIII	A Case of Nerves	76
IX	Treating the Case	84
X	Injuns!	93
XI	Benefits of Fasting	102
XII	A Complete Cure	111
XIII	An Unexpected Cache	119
XIV	Happy's New Ambition	126
XV	Tender Feelings	133
XVI	Themis in the Rockies	144
XVII	Kit Murray	158
XVIII	Testing the Friar's Nerve	171
XIX	Other People's Business	180
XX	Quarreling for Peace	193
XXI	Peace to Start a Quarrel	203
XXII	A Progressive Hunt	214
XXIII	A Little Gun-Play	222

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
XXIV	Night-Prowlers	233
XXV	The Trade-Rat's Christmas-Gift	242
XXVI	A Contested Life-Title	250
XXVII	A Strange Alliance	261
XXVIII	The Heart of Happy Hawkins	271
XXIX	The Little Town of Bosco	276
XXX	Ty Jones Gets a Woman	284
XXXI	Justice Undelayed	296
XXXII	The Friar Goes Alone	305
XXXIII	The Friar Given Two Weeks	313
XXXIV	A Cross for Every Man	321
XXXV	The Friar a Complication	330
XXXVI	A Side-Trip to Skelty's	337
XXXVII	Promotheus in the Toils	348
XXXVIII	Olaf Runs the Blockade	357
XXXIX	Skirmishes	366
XL	An Irritating Grin	373
XLI	The Night-Attack	382
XLII	Hand to Hand	397
XLIII	The Gift of the Dawn	410
XLIV	Ty Jones Nods His Head	419
XLV	The Little Gust o' Wind	428
XLVI	The Final Moves	441

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ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

He shot his hand across an' pulled his gun quick as a flash; but Horace didn't move, he just sat still, with a friendly smile on his face. *See page 223* . . . . . *Frontispiece*

We found the singer on foot with a noose about his neck an' nine rather tough-lookin' citizens holdin' a parley with him 6

The cow had forgot all about havin' had her hoofs pared, an' she took after him like a hungry coyote 106

"I intend to kill you," said Olaf, as calm as though talkin' about a sick sheep

"It would be a foolish waste of time," replied the Friar, as if he was advisin' a ten-year-old boy not to fish when the Blue Bull was high and muddy. "It wouldn't do any good, and I shall not allow it" 173

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FRIAR TUCK

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FRIAR TUCK

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEETING

It 's a curious thing — life. Ya might just as well ask a kitten to chase her own tail or a dog to bay at the evenin' star, or a periodical spring to run constant, as to ask a feller right out to tell a story. Some things can only be done spontaneous.

Friar Tuck used to say 'at whenever he could cut it, he allus got on the lee side o' human nature and let it blow down on him natural; and my way o' gettin' to the lee side o' human nature in story-tellin' is not to ask for a story, but to start tellin' one myself. And it 's a good plan not to put over too good a one either; 'cause if it seems as though a feller is short run on stories, some listener is likely to take pity on him and fit him out with a new assortment so as he won't be such bad company for himself when he 's alone again. This is the way I 've picked up most o' my stories.

Then again, it 's allus hard for me to tell what is the true beginnin' of a story. It 's easy enough to tell cream from milk — after the milk has stood long enough for the cream to rise to the top; but the great trouble is, that a man's own recollections have n't stood long enough for him to skim out just what part he might be in need of.

Without meanin' the least mite o' disrespect to any one, it does seem to me that if I was able to plan out any sort of

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a memory at all, I could have made a few improvements on the ones we now have.

My own memory is as stubborn as a mule and as grippy as a bulldog. What it does remember, it calls up in the shape o' pictures; and I see old things just as plain as livin', breathin' beings; but try as I would, I never could keep my memory from loadin' herself down with so many trifles that sometimes I 've had to spade it over as many as six times to turn up some important item which I was actually in need of. When my memory 's in a good humor, I like to start a pipe and lean back and just watch old scenes over again, the same as if I was in a the-ater; and I can see every twinkle in a pair o' well-known eyes, which have been lookin' up through six feet of earth for this many a long year, and I can hear — actually hear — the half tones ripplin' through voices which have no more part in my to-day than the perfume o' last year's flowers; and then, like as not, my memory 'll lay her ears back and refuse to confide what I did with my shavin' soap.

When I look back at my own life and compare it with others, it seems like a curious, patch-worky sort of affair, and not much more my own than the lives o' those others with which I compare it. I allus liked my work, and yet it never attracted my attention much. Side-trips and such-like stand out plain as figures in a hand-painted picture, such as I 've seen in hotels down at Frisco; but the work part is just a blotchy, colorless sort of smudge, the same as the background o' one o' these pictures.

When I first took on with Jabez — every one called him ol' Cast Steel Judson at this time — they wanted to know if I could ride. I was nothin' but a regular kid then, so I handed in a purty high average as to my ridin' ability; though,

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truth to tell, I was n't no bronco buster those days. They gave me a genuwine mean one as a starter, and told me to ride him clean or step off and walk.

At that time I did n't even know how to discard a hoss when I could n't stand the poundin' any longer; so when I felt my backbone gettin' wedged too far into my skull, I made a grab for the horn. My luck was on the job that day and I got the quirt, instead. At his next pitch, my hand went up as natural as ever, and I slammed down the quirt as hard as I could. It landed on a ticklish spot and before he had time to make up his mind, the cayuse had started to run, me whalin' him at every jump and givin' thanks between 'em. I rode him good and out as soon as he started to stampede, and they all thought I was a real rider. Well, this gave me a lot o' trouble — tryin' to live up to my reputation — but that 's a good sort o' trouble for a kid to have.

Now I can feel all the sensations o' this ride as plain as though it was this mornin'; but the's a thousand rides since then which have all melted an' run together. The same with most o' the rest o' my work: I allus aimed to do my bit a little quicker and cleaner 'n the rest; but as soon as I learned all the tricks of it, it fell into a rut, like breathin' and seein'. Easteners seem to have an idee that our life must be as carefree and joyous as goin' to a different circus every day in the year; but it ain't: it 's work, just like all other work. We 're a good bit like our ridin' ponies: when we 're in the thick of it we 're too busy to take notice; and when we 're through, we 're hungry — and that 's about the whole story.

Jabez Judson was a high peak, and once a feller knew him, he never ran any risk o' gettin' him mixed up with any one else. He was the settest in his ways of any man I ever had

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much doin's with; but he did n't change about any — if he faced north on a question one day, he faced north on it always; so a feller could tell just how any action would strike him, and this made livin' with him as accurate as workin' out a problem in multiplication, which I claim to hold qualities o' comfort.

His daughter, Barbie, was a little tot when I first took on; and she was the apple of ol' Cast Steel's eye; an' his curb bit, and his spurs as well. Barbie and I were pals from one end o' the trail to the other, and this explains a lot o' my life which otherwise would n't have any answer. My ordinary work at the Diamond Dot was n't out-standin' enough to give me any special privileges; but I happened to come back one time when the Brophy gang was about to clean things out, and Jabez gave me credit for savin' Barbie's life; so 'at he did n't check up my time any and I did purty much as I pleased, only quittin' him when I could n't put up with his set ways any longer. I aimed to play fair with Jabez, and he with me; but once in a while we locked horns, though not often, takin' everything into account.

It was shortly after ol' Cast Steel had brought in the D lazy L brand, an' we was still pickin' up strays here an' there. Whenever he bought up a brand he allus put the Diamond Dot on the stuff as soon as he could, his mark commandin' more respect than some o' the little fellers'.

When I 'd get tired o' loafing about the home place, I 'd take one o' the boys an' we 'd start out to look for stray hosses. Spider Kelley was with me this time, an' we had meandered here an' there until we had picked up a big enough string to stand as an excuse for our trip, and were about minded to start back.

We had just forded a little crick when we heard a man's

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voice singin' off to the right. The' was a mess o' cottonwoods between us, an' we stopped to listen. Now I had never heard that voice before, an' I had never seen the man who was running it; but right then I was ready to believe anything he had a mind to tell me. It was a deep, rich voice; but mellow an' tender, an' a feller could tell that he was singin' simply because he could n't help it.

Spider looked at me with his face shinin', an' I could feel a sort o' pleasant heat in my own face. The' was a lift an' a swing, and a sort of rally-around-the-flag to this voice which got right into ya, an' made you want to do something.

"'T is thine to save from perils of perdition
The souls for whom the Lord His life laid down;
Beware, lest, slothful to fulfill thy mission,
Thou lose one jewel that should deck His crown.
Publish glad tidings; tidings of peace;
Tidings of Jesus, redemption and release."

"That feller can sing some," sez Spider Kelley; but just then the ponies turned back on us an' by the time we had started 'em on again, the singer had passed on up the trail, so I did n't make any reply.

I was tryin' to figure out whether it was the words or the tune or the voice, or what it was that had made my whole body vibrate like a fiddle string. As I said before, I see things in pictures an' I also remember 'em in pictures: a sound generally calls up a picture to me an' it ain't allus a picture anyways connected with the sound itself. This song, for instance, had called to my mind a long procession of marchin' men with banners wavin' an' set faces, shinin' with a glad sort o' recklessness. There ain't no accountin' for the human mind: I had never seen such a procession in real life, nor even in a picture; but that was what this

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song out there on the open range suggested to me, an' I hurried out o' the cottonwoods eager to measure the singer with my open eyes.

When we climbed up out of the woods, we saw him goin' up the pass ahead of us with our ponies followin' behind as though they was part of his outfit. We could just catch glimpses of him; enough to show that he was a big man on a big roan hoss, an' that he was a ridin' man in spite o' the fact that he was wearin' black clothes made up Eastern style. He was still singin' his song, an' I straightened up in my saddle, an' beat time with my hand as though I held a genuwine sword in it; which is a tool I 've never had much doin's with.

We scrambled on up the trail, an' when we reached the top we found a little park with the grass knee high an' a fringe o' spruce trees about it. The song had come to a sudden end, an' we found the singer on foot with a noose about his neck an' nine rather tough-lookin' citizens holdin' a parley with him. We came to the same sort of a stop the song had, an' Spider Kelley sez in a low tone, " What do ya suppose this is? "

" I don't know," sez I, touchin' my pony, " but I 'm with the singer "; so me an' Spider rode on down to 'em.

I purty well sensed what it was: the' was a heap o' rebrandin' bein' done at that time, an' stringin' a man up was supposed to be the only cure; but I was willin' to bet my roll that this singer was n't a rustler. The feller in charge o' the posse was an evil-lookin' cuss, an' if he 'd 'a' had the rope around his neck, it would n't have looked so misplaced. He was ridin' a Cross brand hoss; so I guessed him to belong to the Tyrrel Jones outfit. Most o' the others in the posse was ridin' the same brand o' hosses an' wearin'

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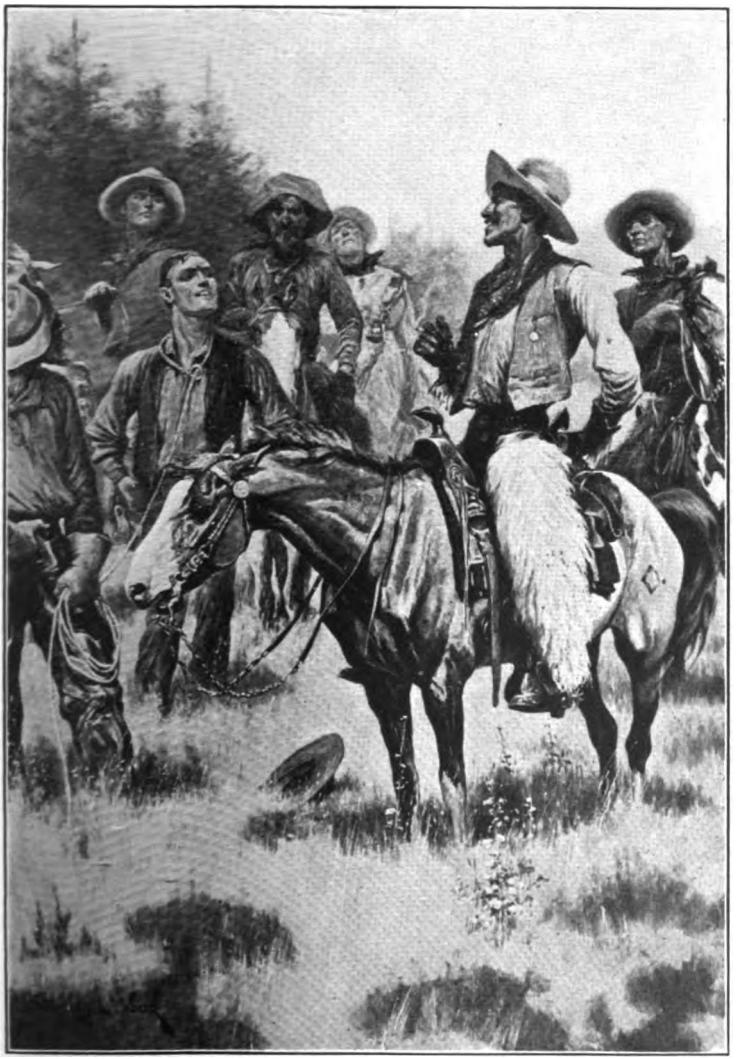

We found the singer on foot with a noose about his neck an' nine rather tough-lookin' citizens holdin' a parley with him

See page 6

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the same brand of expressions. It was a tough-lookin' bunch.

We came up to 'em an' they looked our ponies an' us over an' nodded. We nodded back an' I asked 'em what seemed to be the trouble.

"We've finally got the feller who has been doin' the rustlin' out this way," sez the leader, whose name was Flannigan, Badger-face Flannigan.

"That's good," sez I; "but he don't look the part."

"He acts it all right," growls Badger-face, showin' his fangs in what was meant for a grin. "He's ridin' one of our hosses, an' leadin' a string o' D lazy Ls."

"Leadin' 'em?" sez I.

"Yes, he's got some sort of a charm in his voice. Whiskers, here, saw him go up on foot an' rope this colt an' lead him off the same as a plow hoss."

"Did Whiskers, here, see him charm the loose string, too?" I asked.

"No, he came in an' collected the posse, an' we decided that this would be a good place to try him; so we cut up the other pass an' waited for him. When he came up, this bunch o' ponies was taggin' after him."

I looked at the man with the noose about his neck, an' he was grinnin' as easy an' comfortable as I ever saw a man grin in my life. He was wearin' a vest without buttons an' a gray flannel shirt. He had a rifle on his saddle an' a six-shooter on his right hip. He had big gray eyes set wide apart under heavy brows, an' they were dancin' with laughter. I grinned into 'em without intendin' to, an' sez: "Well, I don't really think he charmed these loose ponies intentional. Me an' Spider was takin' 'em in to the Diamond Dot an' we had a hard time makin' 'em ford the crick. I'm some thankful to him for tollin' 'em up the pass."

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Badger-face scowled. "Well, anyhow, he charmed the beast he 's ridin, all right; an' he has to swing for it."

"Are you all done with tryin' him," sez I.

"What 's the use of a trial?" snarled Badger-face. "Ain't he ridin' a Cross brand hoss, ain't the brand unvented, don't every one know that we never sell a hoss without ventin' the brand, an' can't any one see 'at this hoss was never rode before?"

"Got anything to say for yourself, stranger?" I asked.

"Not much," sez the prisoner. "I have an appointment to keep at Laramie; my hoss gave out; so I just caught a fresh one an' started on."

"What more do you want?" asked Badger-face of me.

"Well, now, the' ain't any particular hurry; an' I 'm kind o' curious to learn a little more of his methods," sez I impartial. "Don't ya know 'at this is what they call hoss-stealin' out this way?" I asked of the stranger.

"No, this is not stealin'," he replied. "I turned another hoss loose that I had picked up a hundred miles or so farther back; and I should have turned this one adrift as soon as he had tired. They allus wander back to their own range."

This was n't no unheard-of custom to practice out our way; but it was a new sort o' defence for a man with a noose about his neck to put up, an' I see that some o' the others was gettin' interested. The big man had a smile like a boy, an' steady eyes, an' a clear skin; an' he did n't look at all the kind of a man to really need stretchin'.

"What 's your plan for earnin' a livin'?" I asked.

"I am a kind of apostle," sez he, "an' I live on the bounty of others."

"Do you mean 'at you 're a preacher?" asked Badger-face.

"Yes," the stranger replied with a smile.

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"Well, I never see a preacher with as short hair as yours, nor one who carried so much artillery, nor one who made a practice o' pickin' up a fresh hoss whenever he felt like it. Where 'd you learn to ride, an' where 'd you learn to rope?"

"Eastern Colorado. I lived there four years, an' travelled on hossback," sez the stranger.

"I 'll bet you left there mighty sudden," sez Badger-face with an evil leer.

"Yes," replied the stranger, with a grin, "an' I also left on hossback."

"Well, ya satisfied now?" grunted Badger-face to me.

Livin' out doors the way I had, I naturally had a big respect for brands. It 's mighty comfortin' to feel that ya can turn your stuff loose an' know that it 's not likely to be bothered; so I was up something of a stump about this new doctrine. "Where 'd you get your commission from to pick up a hoss whenever you feel like it?" sez I to the stranger.

He had a little leather sack hangin' from his saddle horn, an' he reached into it an' fished out a small book with a soft leather cover. The feller 'at was holdin' his hoss eyed him mighty close for fear it was some sort of a gun; but the stranger ran over the leaves with his fingers as ready as a man would step into the home corral an' rope his favorite ridin' pony.

"Here 's my commission," sez he, as self-satisfied as though he was holdin' a government document; an' then he read aloud with that deep, mellow voice o' his, the story of the time the Lord was minded to let himself out a little an' came into Jerusalem in state. He read it all, an' then he paused, looked about, holdin' each man's eyes with his own for a second, an' then he read once more the part where the Lord had sent in a couple of his hands after the colt that

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no man had ever backed before — an' then he closed the book, patted it gentle an' shoved it back into the leather bag. I looked around on the posse, an' most of 'em was rubbin' their chins, an' studyin'. I 've noticed that while the earth is purty well cluttered up with pale-blooded an' partially ossified Christians, the's mighty few out an' out atheists among 'em.

" That don't go," sez Badger-face, after he 'd taken time to pump up his nerve a little.

No one said anything for a space, an' then the stranger put a little edge on his voice, but spoke in a lower tone than before: " That does go," he said. " No matter what else in life may be questioned, no matter how hard and fast a title may stick, it must crumble to dust when one comes and says, ' The Lord hath need of this.' It may be your life or it may be your property or it may be the one being you love most in all the world; but when the Lord hath need, your own needs must fall away.

" Now, boys, I love the West, I glory in the fact that I can lay something down and go on about my business an' come back a month later and find it just where I left it; and if I was takin' these hosses to sell or trade or use for my own selfish ends, why, I would n't have a word to say again' your stringin' me up. I brought my own hoss into this country and when it gave out I did n't have time to barter an' trade for another one; so I just caught one, and when it grew weary, I turned it adrift. I don't claim the hosses I ride; I don't want to own them; I simply borrow them for a while because my Lord hath need of them. I treat them well, and when they weary, send 'em back to their own range with a pat, and pick up another. The next fellow who rides that hoss will find it a little less trouble than if I had n't used it,

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and there 's no harm done at all. I 'm working with you, I 'm going to make your own work easier out here by raisin' the respect for brands, not by makin' property rights any looser; and you are goin' to work with me — whether you want to or not. Now then, how much longer are you goin' to keep this fool noose about my neck?"

That posse was n't easy minded, not by a jugful. This stranger was speakin' as though he had power an' authority an' public opinion all on his side, and they felt consid'able like the tenderfoot who 'd roped the buffalo — they was willin' to quit any time he was.

The Cross brand boys were purty sullen an' moody; but four o' the posse belonged to another outfit, an' they could n't stand the strain. One of 'em, a grizzled old codger with one lamp missin', lifted the noose from the prisoner's neck, an' sez most respectful: "Parson, I 'm an old man. I ain't heard a sermon for forty years, an' I 'd be right obliged to ya if you 'd make us one."

Badger-face, he snorted scornful; but the rest of the posse was scattered all the way from repentance to sheepishness, an' the stranger he stepped to a little rise an' he certainly did speak us a sermon. First off, he sang us St. Andrew's hymn — I got to learn a good many of his songs after this, but o' course at that time I was as shy on hymns as the rest o' the crowd.

I tell you it was wonderful up in that little park, with the lush grass for a carpet, the spruce trees for panelin', the bare peaks stickin' out for rafter-beams, the blue sky above for ceiling, and that soft, deep voice fillin' the whole place an' yet stealin' into a feller's heart as easy an' gentle as a woman's whisper. He sort o' beat time as though playin' on an instrument, until before he was through

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we were all hummin' in time with him — an' then he preached.

He told us about the fisher folks an' how they lived out doors under the stars the same as we did; and that this was probably why the Lord had chose 'em first to follow him. He said that city folks got to relyin' on themselves so much 'at they was likely to forget that the whole earth was still held in the hollow of the hand which had created it; but that men who lived with nature, out under the sun and the stars, through the heat and the cold, the wind and the rain, the chinook and the blizzard, felt the forces and the mysteries all about them and this kept 'em in touch, even when they did n't know it themselves, with the great central Intelligence back o' these forces and mysteries. Then he told 'em how grand their lives might be if they would only give up their nasty little habits of thought, and learn to think broad and free and deep, the same as they breathed.

He told 'em 'at their minds could breathe the inspiration of God as easy as their lungs could breathe the pure air o' the mountains, if they 'd only form the habit. Then he talked to 'em friendly an' confidential about their natural devilment. He did n't talk like a saint speakin' out through a crack in the gates o' Paradise, like most preachers do. He called the turn on the actual way they cut up when they went to town, and just how it hurt 'em body an' soul; and his face grew set and earnest, and his eyes blazed; and then he said a few words about mothers an' children and such, and wound up with a short prayer.

Well two o' those fellers owned up right out in public and said that from that on they was goin' to lead a decent sort of life; and one other said 'at he did n't have any

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faith in himself any longer; but he insisted on signin' the pledge, and said if that worked, why, he 'd go on an' try the rest of it.

The preacher shook hands with 'em all around — he had a grip 'at would n't be no disgrace for a silver-tip — an' then he sez that if any of 'em has the notion that bein' a Christian makes a weakling of a man, why, he 's willin' to wrastle or box or run a race or shoot at a mark or do any other sort of a stunt to show 'at he 's in good order; but they size him up and take his word for it.

"Now, boys," sez he, "I hope we 'll meet often. I 'm your friend, and I want you to use me any time you get a chance. Any time or any place that I can serve one of you, just get me word and I 'll do the best I can. It don't matter what sort o' trouble you get into, get me word and I 'll help — if I can find a way. And I wish 'at you 'd speak it around that I 'm hard on hosses, so that the other fellows will understand when I pick one up, and not cause any delay. I 'll have to hurry along now. Good-bye; I 'm sorry I 've been a bother to ya."

He swung up on the big roan, waved his hand and trotted out o' the park; and just as he went down the pass on the other side, it seemed that he could n't hold it in any longer; so he opened up his voice in his marchin' song again, an' we all stayed silent as long as we could hear the sound of it.

"Well we are a lot of soft marks!" sez Badger-face at last.

"That there is a true man," replied old Grizzly, shakin' his head, "an' I 'll bet my boots on it."

This seemed to be the general verdict, an' the Cross brand fellers went off discussin' the parson, an' me an'

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Spider Kelley collected our ponies an' went along to the ranch, also discussin' him.

That was the first time I ever saw Friar Tuck; I made up my mind about him just from hearin' his voice, an' before I ever saw him; but I never had to make it up any different. New lead an' new steel look consid'able alike; but the more ya wear on lead, the sooner it wears out, while the more you wear on steel, the brighter it gets. The Friar was steel, an' mighty well tempered.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE BETTIN' BARBER O' BOGGS

YES, this was about the time I got interested in the bettin' barber over at Boggs. He has n't anything to do with this story I 'm about to tell ya, except that it was him 'at give the Friar his name; so I 'll just skim through this part as hasty as possible. When a feller is tellin' me a story, I want him to stick to the trail of it; but it seems like when I try to tell one, myself, some feller is allus askin' me a question 'at takes me clear out o' range.

All barbers are more or less different, except in what might be called the gift o' gab. This one came out to Boggs station, an' started a shop. His name was Eugene, an' he was a little man with two rollin' curls to his front hair, which he wore short behind. A curious thing about little men is, that they don't never find it out. A little man produces more opinions 'n airy other kind, an' being small, they have n't no place to store 'em up until they get time to ripen. A little man gives out his opinion an' then looks savage — just as if he 'd get a switch an' make ya believe it, whether you wanted to or not.

Eugene had come from every city the' is in the world, an' he used to tell scandlous tales about the prominent people who lived in 'em whose hair he had cut. He was also familiar with the other things which had happened since they 've begun to write history, an' if any one would doubt one of his statements, he 'd whirl about holding up

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his razor, an' say: "I'll bet ya a dollar I can prove it."

All of us fellers used to go in as often as we got a chance to get our chins shaved an' our hair shampooed — just to hear Eugene get indignant about things which was n't none of our business. We used to bet with him a lot, just for the fun o' makin' him prove up things; which he did by writin' letters to somebody an' gettin' back the answers he wanted. We did n't have any way to prove our side; so Eugene got the money an' we had the fun.

Ol' man Dort ran the general store and kept a pet squirrel in a whirlabout cage, which was the biggest squirrel I ever see, an' had its tail gnawed off by a rat, or something, before Eugene came. Ol' man Dort had a reputation for arguin', which spread all over our part of the earth. We had made a habit o' goin' to him to get our discussions settled an' when we began to pass him up for Eugene, he foamed about it free an' frank.

He wore a prodigious tangle o' hair and a bunch o' grizzled whiskers, about as fine an' smooth as a clump o' greasewood. He used to brag that razor nor scissors had n't touched his hide for twenty years, an' one of us boys would allus add, "Nor soap nor water, neither," an' ol' man Dort would grin proud, 'cause it was a point of honor with him.

Eugene used to send out for his wearin' an' sech, so ol' man Dort did n't get a whack at him in his store; ol' man Dort batched, an' Eugene boarded, so they did n't clash up at their meals; an' finally ol' man Dort swore a big oath that he was goin' to be barbered. The news got out an' the boys came in for forty miles to see the fun — an' it was worth it.

We went early to the shop an' planted ourselves, lookin'

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solemn an' not sayin' anything to put Eugene on his guard. When at last ol' man Dort hove in sight with his brows scowled down an' his jaws set under his shrubbery, we all bit our lips; an' Eugene stopped tellin' us about the hair-roots o' the Prince of Wales, an' stood lookin' at ol' man Dort with his mouth gapped wide open.

The ol' man came in, shut the door careful behind him, glared at Eugene, as though darin' him to do his worst, an' said: "I want my hair shamped, an' my whiskers shaved off."

"If you expected to get it all done in one day, you should ought to have come earlier," sez Eugene soberly, but tossin' us a side wink.

"Well, you do as much as you can to-day, an' we 'll finish up to-morrow," sez ol' man Dort, not seein' the joke.

Ol' man Dort peeled off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, an' climbed into the chair as if he thought it was liable to buck him off. Then he settled back with a grunt, an' Eugene tucked the bib in around his neck, combed his fingers through ol' man Dort's hair a minute, an' sez; "Your hair 's startin' to come out. You should ought to use a tonic."

"Tonic, hell!" snaps the ol' man. "My hair sheds out twice a year, same as the rest o' the animals."

"Then you should ought to comb it," sez Eugene. "I 've got some hair here in my hand which was shed out two years ago. Leavin' dead hair an' such rubbish as that layin' around on your scalp is what kills the hair globules."

"It don't either; it acts like fertilizer, the same as dead grass does," sez ol' man Dort. He had made up his mind to take the contrary side of everything 'at Eugene said, an' it was more fun than a dog fight.

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Eugene started in by mowin' away the whiskers, an' it was a long an' painful job; 'cause it was almost impossible to tell where they left off an' ol' man Dort began, an' then they was so cluttered up with grit an' dead hair and kindry deb-ris that his scissors would choke up an' pull, an' then ol' man Dort would bob up his head an' yell out a bunch o' profanity, and Eugene would stand back an' say that he was a barber, not a clearer of new ground, an' that the job ought to be done with a scythe and hoe, not with scissors an' razor. Eugene was n't covetous of ol' man Dort's trade an' did n't care whether he insulted him or not.

The most fun came, though, after Eugene had got down to where he could tell the outline of ol' man Dort's face. First he soaked it with lather, combin' it in with a comb, an' puttin' hot towels on it to draw out the alkalie grit an' give his razors some show.

One of ol' man Dort's manias was, that a man ought to pay his debts, whether it killed him or not; so as soon as Eugene had him steamin' under the towels we begun to talk about a man's first duty bein' toward his kin, an' that if he could n't pay his debts without bother, he ought to let the debts go an' show his relatives a good time while they was still on earth an' able to enjoy themselves.

Ol' man Dort could n't stand it, an' tried to answer back from under the towels; but got his mouth full o' suds, an' choked on the corner of a towel until Eugene said that if he could n't sit still an' behave himself he could go out to some alfalfa farmer to get his tonsoral work completed.

It was n't the ol' man's fault — he simply could n't help it. Touch him up on a ticklish subject, an' he just had to come back at ya, same as a rattler. Finally, however, Eugene had the stubble wore down an' softened until he

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decided that he stood a chance again' it, an' then he lathered an' rubbed, an' lathered an' rubbed, until nothin' stuck out below ol' man Dort's eyes except the peak of his nose; an' then us boys pulled out our trump card an' played it strong. We began to talk about red squirrels.

Now, we did n't know anything professional about squirrels, except what ol' man Dort had told us; but we slewed his talk around this way an' that as if it was our own private opinions; an' the ol' man began to groan audible. He gritted his teeth, though, an' bore up under it like a hero, until Eugene begin to chip in with what he knew about squirrels.

Eugene was never content to just speak of a thing in a general way — his main method of convincin' us was to allus fall back on his own personal experience; so this time he began to tell of squirrels what he had been full acquainted with. He called 'em by name an' told how they would run to meet him an' climb up on his shoulders an' chatter for nuts, an' so on; until the ol' man's ears turned red with the strain he was under. And then, we got to discussin' the size o' squirrels.

We told about squirrels we had heard about, an' contested again' each other to see which had heard o' the biggest one; but we never even mentioned ol' man Dort's squirrel. Eugene had shaved his way down to below the lobe of ol' man Dort's right ear, slippin' in a side remark to our talk every minute or so; an' purty soon he sez 'at he knows a squirrel by the name o' Daniel Webster back in Montpelier, Vermont, which was a full half inch longer 'n airy red squirrel we had spoke of. The ol' man could n't stand this. His head bobbed up, cuttin' a gash on the crook of his jaw, and as soon as he could blow the foam out of his mouth, he

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sez, "I 'll stake my life, the' ain't another squirrel in this country as big as my own Ben Butler."

Eugene put his hand on ol' man Dort's forehead an' pushed him back into the headrest. "You lie there," sez he, "until I get done shavin' ya. Then, I 'll bet ya a dollar that I can produce a livin' squirrel which 'll out-stand, outweigh, an' out-fight your squirrel — an' I ain't never seen your squirrel."

"A dollar!" snorts the ol' man, flickin' up his head. "I would n't bother wakin' Ben Butler up for a measly dollar. I 'll bet ya ten dollars."

"Get back on that headrest," orders Eugene. "Ten dollars looks a heap sight better to me than one, an' I 'll be mighty glad to accommodate ya."

Eugene took his fire-stick an' burned the ol' man's cut, an' the ol' man had to scruge up his shoulders with the pain of it; but he did it without noticin', 'cause his mind was on squirrels. "What breed o' squirrels is yours?" he asked.

"If you don't keep your head where I put it, I 'll throw up the job an' let you go forth lookin' like the lost Goog o' Mayhan," sez Eugene, raisin' his voice. Ol' man Dort was a whalin' big man, an' it tickled us a heap to see little Eugene givin' him directions, like as if he was nothin' but a pup dog.

Ol' man Dort settled back with a sigh, an' Eugene leathered up his razor without sayin' anything for a minute or two. Then he sez, as he begins shavin' again: "That squirrel I have in mind for ring contests is the short-tailed grizzly ground-squirrel; and it 's the biggest breed of squirrels the' is."

"The' ain't no such a breed of squirrel as that!" yells ol'

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man Dort, springing erect in his chair, an' dullin' Eugene's razor by the operation.

Eugene stepped back an' looked at the blood flowin' from the fresh cut, an' he sez slow an' sarcastic; "If it don't make any difference to you whether you have any skin on your face or not, why I 'll just peel it off an' tack it on a board to shave it; but hanged if I 'm goin' to duck around tryin' to shave you on the jump. The' is too grizzly ground-squirrels."

Well, that 's the way they had it back and forth: every time they would settle down to business an' Eugene would get a square inch o' the ol' man's face cleared up, one of us boys would speak something in a low tone about there bein' rumors of an uncommon big squirrel out at some ranch house a hundred miles or so from there, Eugene would ask what breed of squirrel it was, an' then decide that it could n't be a patchin' on a genuwine short-tailed grizzly ground-squirrel, an' then ol' man Dort could n't stand it no longer an' he would forget what he was doin', bob up in his chair, an' lose some more of his life fluid.

Eugene scraped down both sides o' the ol' man's face, givin' all of his razors a chance to take part in the job, an' then he set his lips an' started in on the chin.

"What does short-tailed grizzly ground-squirrels eat, Eugene?" asked Spider Kelley, as innocent as an infant pigeon.

"They eat chickens, —" began Eugene, but ol' man Dort flew clean out o' the chair an' stood over Eugene shakin' with rage.

"Chickens?" he roars. "Chickens! The' never was a squirrel foaled into this world what et chickens."

Eugene looked at ol' man Dort, an' then he wiped his

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razor an' sat down on a chair, so full of disgust that he could hardly breathe.

"I wish you 'd take off that apron an' bleed into the spittoon," he said as calm as he could. "I 've got customers whose patronage is what makes up my living expenses; an' I don't want 'em to come in here an' see the whole place a welter of gore.

"What do you think this shop is, anyway?" yelled Eugene springing to his feet an' entirely losin' his patience. "Do you think that I make my livin' by grubbin' down wire grass which has been let grow for fifty years, an' educatin, ignoramuses in the knowledge of squirrels? I don't care whether you believe in short-tailed grizzly ground-squirrels or not; but if you don't let me tie your head down to that chair, I won't shave another sprout off your chin. I take some pride in my profession, an' I don't intend to have no man go out o' my shop leavin' a trail o' blood which will draw all the dogs for miles around. Now, you can take your choice."

Ol' man Dort had to give in that this was reasonable enough; so he climbed back into the chair, an' Eugene tied down his head an' finished him off without any more trouble. As soon as he had stopped the bleedin' an' put on the perfume an' oil an' powder, he sez: "Now, what I am goin' to do is to get some nourishment to recuperate back my strength, an' if you want the waste products washed out o' your hair, you come back here at one o'clock prompt."

"I want to settle on that bet first," said ol' man Dort, who was just as pernicious as Eugene, once you got him riled up.

"I 'll make that bet with you after dinner," sez Eugene, "but first off I got to have food; I 'm faint with weakness. Now, I 'm goin' to lock up my shop."

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After Eugene had marched off to his boardin' house, we all gathered around ol' man Dort, an' complimented him on his improved appearance, though to be strictly honest, the' was considerable doubts about it. He had two teeth out in front, an' the tobacco habit; and now, with no shrubbery to catch the spray, he spluttered terrible when he tried to talk fast. He said, though, that as long as he had started in he intended to take the full course, an' was comin' back, as soon as he 'd had a bite to eat, to get his hair laundried an' trimmed up some around the edges; an' then he was goin' to make that bet about the squirrels.

It was some amusin' to see the ol' man get his hair sluiced out, but not near as much fun as seein' him shaved. Whenever Eugene found any stray product, he 'd call us all over an' show it to us, an' this riled the ol' man up considerable; but the best joke was when Eugene found a woman's hairpin.

The ol' man vowed an' declared an' carried on somethin' fierce; but there was the hairpin, an' we made him pay for three rounds on the strength of it. As soon as Eugene was all through, the ol' man settled the bill, payin' for a full day's work like a regular sport, an' not tryin' to beg off at the ordinary retail price; and then he hardened his face an' sez: "Now I bet you ten dollars, that you can't bring forward a squirrel as big as my Ben Butler."

"I 'll take that bet," sez Eugene, "but you got to give me time to locate a short-tailed grizzly. It 's the scarcest breed the' is, an' it 'll probably cost me twice the sum to get one, but I don't care about that. What I want is to vindicate myself. I 'd like to see that squirrel o' yours."

"You come right along," sez ol' man Dort, glowin' with pride. "I reckon when you see him, you 'll just hand over

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the money at once — That is, if you know anything at all about squirrels."

We all marched around to the general store, an' ol' man Dort pounded on the cage. When Ben Butler sat up an' looked around to see what was up, the ol' man waved his hand at him, looked down at Eugene, an' sez: "Well?" He said it just like that: "Wu-el?"

Ben Butler was rollin' fat, an' he certainly did look like some squirrel to us; but Engene merely glanced at him, an' sez: "Hum, what we call a dwarf red squirrel, up in Nova Scotia. They have tails, though, up there."

The ol' man spluttered till we had to pound him on the back. "Dwarf?" he chokes out. "Dwarf! You produce a squirrel to match him, will ya, or else you pack up your truck an' move on. I don't intend to have no — "

"See here, ol' man," sez Eugene, pointin' a finger at him the same as if he 'd been a naughty child. "A short-tailed grizzly ground-squirrel is from two to four times as big as this one, so if you want to sidestep the bet, you can do it; but if you want to have some show for your money, I bet you fifty to ten that I can get a squirrel three times as big as this one. I own up that for its kind, this squirrel is of fair, average growth; but — "

"I 'll take that bet!" yelled the old man. "We 'll put up our money with Ike Spargle this minute; but I don't want your odds. I 'll bet you even money."

Eugene shook his head as if he pitied the ol' man, an' he sez, "Have n't you never travelled none, or seen a zoological garden?"

"Yes, I 've travelled some, an' I 've seen all kinds o' gardens," flares back the ol' man; "but what I want now is to fix up this bet."

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"Who 'll be the judges?" sez Eugene.

"I don't care a snap. Any man who can see through the holes in a ladder 'll be able to decide between the claims o' two squirrels. Ike Spargle an' Bill Thompson can be the judges."

"There has to be three," sez Eugene. "We 'll have Dan Stedman be the other."

So they put up the money an' Eugene was to have six weeks to get his squirrel; an' from that on we begun to divide up into rival camps. The' was n't any tree squirrels out in that neck o' the woods, an' we had all forgot what wild squirrels really was like. We knew the' was ground-squirrels, red squirrels, gray squirrels, an' flyin'-squirrels — although an argument was started about there bein' flyin'-fish all right, but no flyin'-squirrels, which would have ended in warfare if Eugene had n't been handy to settle it.

You would n't think that a little thing like a bet about the size of a squirrel would take the way it did; but Eugene was so confident on his side, an' ol' man Dort was so dead sure of Ben Butler, that the rest of us split up an' we each had a little side bet on the outcome. It seemed a tarnation long time while we was waitin'; but in a little over a month, Eugene got a big box which he took into his back room without lettin' even the fellers who had backed his squirrel get a peep at it.

From that on we got shaved twice a day an' our heads washed till the hair started to change color; so that Eugene's trade was so improved that even if he lost the bet, he was money ahead; but he scoffed the idy o' losin' the bet, even after his squirrel arrived; and as he was the only man who had seen both the contestants, he had the whole country up in the air.

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Ol' man Dort had made his squirrel run around the wheel four hours a day, pokin' him up with a stick when he got lazy; an' this gave Ben Butler sech a prodigious appetite that the ol' man had to set up late at night to give him an extra meal. As the day o' settlement came closer, the ol' man tapered off on the exercise, an' doubled up on the feed, until Ben Butler looked a full size larger, an' us fellers who had our money on Eugene's squirrel began to get shaky. If it had been just an even race, it would have been a fair deal; but to have to show a squirrel three times larger than Ben Butler seemed an impossibility.

Eugene had been fussin' over his entry too, an' we used to sneak up behind his shop at nights to listen to him. We could hear him snippin' with scissors and pullin' stoppers out o' bottles and when he was through he 'd say: "Stand up there, Columbus" — which was the name of his champion, an' then he would seem to pass in a bunch o' feed, an' say — "Good boy, Columbus! that dwarf red squirrel can turn a double handspring in your shadder."

This used to hearten us up again, and we 'd lay a little more money on Eugene's squirrel. Ike, an' Bill, an' Dan — the judges — said that they did n't claim to know anything about the breeds o' squirrels, an' all they was to judge on was the size, which would be settled by weight if the' was any dispute. They got kind o' nervous toward the end, 'cause the fellers were all on edge, an' a rank decision meant trouble in bunches.

When the final day o' settlement arrived, Boggs was seven deep with fellers on edge to see the outcome. Most of us had all we could spare hung up in bets; but the' was still a lot o' coin in the crowd, and a crew came over from Cheyenne to take charge of it.

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They had a game which certainly was attractive, I 'll say that much for it. It was a round board full o' numbers, and up the middle was a tower with slopin' sides covered with nails. A marble was dropped into a hole at the top and bobbled on the nails until it went into a row of holes at the bottom, and came out in a groove leadin' to one o' the numbers. Some o' these numbers doubled the player's money, some of 'em paid it over to the table; but most of 'em was neutral, and a feller had to double what he already had up, in order to stand a show. It was an innocent-appearin' game, but deceptive. When a feller had up all he could raise, some stranger would offer him two bits for his chance, put up the doublin' money — and win. This was a capper o' course; but crowds don't have any sense when they start gamblin', and this crew was cleanin' us out until, all of a sudden, I heard a clear, low-toned voice say: "If one o' you boys would upset that table, you 'd see the lever which controls the marble."

I glanced up, and there was the Singin' Parson, as cool as a frozen fish. Ol' Tom Williams, commonly known as "Tank," had just lost six dollars, and he upset the table and saw just how tight braced the blame game was. Then he unlimbered his gun, and suggested that he would feel calmer if he had the six dollars back, and the Cheyenne gambler looked into Tank's free eye, which was pointin' at the ceilin', and he seconded Tank's motion. After this the rest o' the boys collected what they felt was due 'em, and the Cheyenne crowd had to fall back on charity for their noon lunch.

Just about one o'clock, the head crook saw the Singin' Parson standin' close to Eugene's barber shop. The shop was locked, and the crowd around was lookin' at it. The crook did n't want to attract any attention; so, instead o' usin'

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a gun, he struck at the Parson with a club. He miscalculated, and hit the shoulder instead o' the head. The Parson whirled, grabbed the club with his left hand, and the crook's shirt collar with his right. The crook started to pull; but we settled down on him, and were all ready to serve out justice, when the Parson interrupted to say that it was none of our business, and if we 'd just form a ring, he 'd settle it to everybody's satisfaction. He said he expected to live among us for the rest of his life, and this would be a good time to introduce his methods.

We took off the crook's weapons, and then formed a big ring. The Parson was smilin' a business-like smile, while the crook was palin' up noticeable. "I am convinced that a man must settle some things, himself, in a new country," sez the Parson. "I am larger than you, so it is fair for you to use this club; but I warn you in advance that I understand how to guard again' clubs, so do your best. I 'm ready, begin."

It was quite eddifyin' to behold: the crook made a vicious smash at the Parson's head, the Parson bent his arm at the elbow, muscle out, so the bone would n't get bruised, stepped in, and hit the crook a swing in the short ribs. Some say it lifted him ten feet, some say only eight; but any way, when he lit, he gave a grunt like an empty barrel, and the Parson had no trouble in layin' him over his knee and givin' him the most liberal spankin' with that club I ever was spectator to; while the crowd howled itself hoarse in the throat.

Now the Parson was n't angry, he grinned all the way through, and when he had taken as much exercise as he felt was good for him, he set the crook on his feet, and talked fatherly advice to him as sober an' dignified as was possible — considerin' the fact that the crook was dancin' about like

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a spider on a hot skillet, and rubbin' the part which had got most intimate with the club.

Eugene had seen it all through his window, and when it was over, he came out and shook the Parson's hand, and said he was just the kind needed in such an ungodly community, and that he reminded him for all the world of Friar Tuck in Robin Hood. Now, we had n't none of us heard of Friar Tuck up to that time; but it was a name well fitted to the tongue, and from the way Eugene said it, we elected it was a compliment; so we gave it to the Singin' Parson on the spot, and it soaked into his bones, and he has n't needed any other since.

This little incident kept us all in a good humor until three o'clock, which was the fatal hour for the squirrel-contest.

Then ol' man Dort marched to the center o' the street, carryin' his cage as though it was full o' diamonds; an' Ben Butler sat up an' chattered as if he was darin' the whole race o' squirrels to bring forth his equal.

"I don't reckon a squirrel could get three times as big as him without explodin'," sez Spider Kelley, who also had his money on Eugene's squirrel.

"Here comes Eugene with Columbus," sez I, not carin' to waste breath on an opinion I had backed up with good money.

Eugene came down the street carryin' one end of a box, with Doc Forbes carryin' the other. The box was covered with a clean apron, an' Eugene was n't lookin' down in the mouth or discouraged.

"From the size o' that box, we 're goin' to have a run for our money," sez Spider. "If Columbus just looks good enough to make 'em settle by the scales, I have n't any kick comin'."

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Well, as Eugene drew closer, that crowd fell into a silence until all a body could hear was Ben Butler braggin' about all the nuts he had et, an' what a prodigious big squirrel he was; but Eugene never faltered. He walked up an' set his box down careful, motioned Doc over to the side lines, made a graceful motion to ol' man Dort, an' sez: "As yours is the local champion you introduce him first, an' make your claim."

Ol' man Dort removed his tobacco, wiped his forehead, an' sez: "Feller citizens, I make the claim that Ben Butler is the biggest full-blooded squirrel ever sent to enlighten the solitude of lonely humanity. This is him."

The ol' man looked lovin'ly down at his squirrel, an' we every one of us gave a rousin' cheer. It was all the family the ol' man had, an' it meant more to him 'n a body who had n't never tried standin' his own company months at a time could realize. Ol' man Dort thrust some new tobacco into his face, bit his lips, winked his eyes rapid, an' bowed to us, almost overcome.

Then Eugene stepped a space to the front, bowed to the crowd in several directions, an' sez: "Gentlemen, an' feller citizens — From Iceland's icy mountains to India's coral strands an' Afric's sunny fountains, every nation an' every clime has produced some peculiar product o' nature which lifts it above an' sets it apart from all the other localities of the globe. When you speak of the succulent banana, the golden orange, or the prickly pineapple, Nova Scotia remains silent; but when you speak of varmints, she rears up on her hind legs and with a glad shout of triumph, she hands forth the short-tailed grizzly ground-squirrel, an' sez, 'Give me the blue ribbons, the gold medals, an' the laurel crowns of victory.' I have the rare pleasure an' the distinctive honor

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of presenting to your notice Columbus, the hugest squirrel ever exhibited within the confines of captivity."

We was so took by Eugene's eloquence that we hardly noticed him slip the apron from in front of his cage; but when we did look, we could hardly get our breath. I was standin' close to the Friar; and at first he looked puzzled, and then his face lit up with a regular boy's grin; but he did n't say a word.

Columbus was certainly a giant; he stood full two feet tall as he sat up an' scrutinized around with a bossy sort of grin. He was dappled fawn color on the sides with a curly black streak down the back an' sort o' chestnut-red below, with a short tail an' teeth like chisels. He won so blame easy that even us what had bet on him did n't cheer.

Ol' man Dort give a grin, thinkin' Ben Butler must have won, an' then he stepped around an' looked into Eugene's cage. He looked first at Columbus, an' then at Ben Butler, then he looked again. "That damned thing ain't alive," he sez. "It 's made up out o' wool yarn. Poke it up an' let me see it move."

"Poke it yourself," sez Eugene. He was one o' these cold-blooded gamblers who ain't got one speck o' decent sentimentality; an' he was mad 'cause we had n't cheered.

Ol' man Dort took a stick an' poked Columbus, an' Columbus give a threatenin' grin, chattered savage, an' bit the stick in two. "Give him the money, Ike," sez ol' man Dort. "I own up I never was in Nova Scotia, an' I never supposed that such squirrels as this grew on the face o' the whole earth. What 'll you take for him?" he sez to Eugene.

"It ain't your fault that you did n't know about him," sez Eugene, thawin' a little humanity into himself. "I don't want to rub it in on nobody; and I 'll give you this here

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squirrel free gratis, 'cause I admit that you know more about squirrels 'n anybody else what ever I met; an' you have the biggest red squirrel the' is in the world."

Then we did give Eugene a cheer, an' everything loosened up, an' we all crowded into Ike Spargle's so that them what won could spend a little money on them what lost.

After a time, ol' man Dort got up on a chair, an' sez: "I want you fellers to know that Columbus won't never be my pet. Ben Butler has been the squarest squirrel ever was, an' he continues to remain my pet; but I 'll study feedin' this condemned foreign squirrel, an' give him a fair show; so that if any outsiders come around makin' brags, we will have a home squirrel to enter again' 'em an' get their money."

Eugene led the cheerin' this time, which made Eugene solider than ever with the boys, an' when Spider an' me got ready to ride home, he an' ol' man Dort had their arms around each other tryin' to sing the Star Spangled Banner.

Spider talked about Columbus most o' the way home, but I was still. The' was somethin' peculiar about the Friar's grin when he first sighted Columbus, and the' was somethin' familiar about that squirrel, an' I was tryin' to adjust myself. Just as we swung to the west on the last turn, I sez to Spider: "Spider, I don't know what I ought to do about this?"

"About what?" sez Spider.

"About this bet?"

"Well, it was a fair bet, was n't it? Columbus is full four times as big as Ben Butler."

"Yes," sez I, "but he ain't no squirrel."

Spider pulled up to a stop. "Ain't no squirrel?" he sez. "What do you take me for, did n't I see him myself? What is he then?"

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" He 's a woodchuck, that 's what he is," sez I. " He 's a genuwine ground hog with his hair cut stylish and died accordin' to Eugene's idy of high art. I remember now that I used to see 'em when I was a little shaver back on my dad's farm in Indiana."

Spider give a whoop, an' then he laughed, an' then he sobered up, an' sez: " Well, you can't do nothin' now, anyway. The judges have decided it, ol' man Dort has give it up, it ain't your game nohow, an' if you was to try to equal back those bets after they have been paid an' mostly spent, you 'd start a heap o' blood-spillin'; an' furthermore, as far as I 'm concerned, I ain't right sure but what a woodchuck, as you call it, ain't some kind of a squirrel. We 'll just let this go an' wait for a chance to put something over on Eugene."

So that 's what we made up to do; but this gives you an idy of how fine a line the Friar drew on questions o' sport. He knew 'at we were n't full fledged angels, and that we had to have our little diversities; but when any professional hold-up men tried to ring in a brace game on us, he could n't see any joke in it, and he upset the money-changers' tables, the same as they was upset that time, long ago, in the temple.

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CHAPTER THREE

ABOVE THE DUST

I 'M only about twice as old as I feel; but I 've certainly seen a lot o' changes take place out this way. I can look back to the time when what most of us called a town was nothin' but a log shack with a barrel of cheap whiskey and a mail-bag wanderin' in once a month or so, from goodness-knows-where. I 've seen the cattle kings when they set their own bounds, made their own laws, and cared as little for government-title as they did for an Injun's. Then, I 've seen the sheep men creep in an inch at a time until they ate the range away from the cattle and began to jump claims an' tyrannize as free and joyous as the cattle men had. Next came the dry farmer, and he was as comical as a bum lamb when he first hove into sight; but I reckon that sooner or later he 'll be the one to write the final laws for this section.

We 're gettin' a good many towns on our map nowadays, we 're puttin' up a lot o' hay, we 're drinkin' cow milk, and we 're eatin' garden truck in the summer. The old West has dried up and blown away before our very eyes, and a few of us old timers are beginnin' to feel like the last o' the buffalo. The 's more money nowadays in boardin' dudes 'n the' is in herdin' cattle, an' that 's the short of a long, long story.

But still we hammered out this country from the rough, and no one can take that away from us. The flag follers trouble, an' business follers the flag, an' law follers business, an' trouble follers the law; but always the first trouble was

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kicked up by boys who had got so 'at they could n't digest home cookin' any longer and just nachely had to get out an' tussle with nature an' the heathen.

They 're a tough, careless lot, these young adventurers; an' they 're always in a state of panic lest the earth get so crowded the' won't be room enough to roll over in bed without askin' permission; so they kill each other off as soon as possible, and thus make room for the patienter ones who follow after. From what I 've heard tell of history, this has been about the way that the white race has managed from the very beginning.

As a general rule it has been purt' nigh a drawn fight between the dark-skins an' the wild animals; then the lads who had to have more elbow-room came along, and the dark-skins and the wild animals had to be put onto reservations to preserve a few speciments as curiosities, while the lads fussed among themselves, each one tryin' to settle down peaceable with his dooryard lappin' over the horizon in all directions. Room, room, room — that was their constant cry. As soon as one would get a neighbor within a day's ride, he 'd begin to feel shut in an' smothered.

Tyrrel Jones was one o' the worst o' this breed. He came out at an early date, climbed the highest peak he could find, and claimed everything 'at his gaze could reach in every direction. Then he invented the Cross brand, put it on a few cows, and made ready to defend his rights. The Cross brand was a simple one, just one straight line crossin' another; and it could be put on in about one second with a ventin' iron, or anything else which happened to be handy. Tyrrel thought a heap o' this brand, an' he did n't lose any chances of puttin' it onto saleable property. His herd grew from the very beginning.

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His home ranch was something over a hundred miles northwest o' the Diamond Dot; but I allus suspicioned that a lot of our doggies had the Cross branded on to 'em. Tyrrel was mighty particular in the kind o' punchers he hired. He liked fellers who had got into trouble, an' the deeper they was in, the better he liked 'em. Character seeks its level, the same as water; so that Tyrrel had no trouble in gettin' as many o' the breed he wanted as he had place for. They did his devilment free and hearty, and when they had a little spare time, they used to devil on their own hook in a way to shame an Injun.

The sayin' was, that a Cross brand puncher could digest every sort o' beef in the land except Cross brand beef. Tyrrel used to grin at this sayin' as though it was a sort of compliment; but some o' the little fellers got purty bitter about it. When a small outfit located on a nice piece o' water, it paid 'em to be well out o' Ty's neighborhood. No one ever had any luck who got in his road; but his own luck boomed right along year after year. He allus kept more men than he needed; an' about once a month he 'd knock in the head of a barrel o' whiskey, an' the tales they used to tell about these times was enough to raise the hair. Ty would work night an' day to get one of his men out of a scrape; but once a man played him false, he either had to move or get buried. He was n't a bad lookin' man, except that he allus seemed keyed up an' ready to spring.

His men all had to be top-notch riders, because he had n't any use for a gentle hoss; he did n't want his hosses trained, he wanted 'em busted, an' the cavey he 'd send along for a round-up would be about as gentle and reliable as a band o' hungry wolves. If a man killed a hoss, why Ty seemed to think it a good joke, an' this was his gait all the way

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along — the rougher the men were, the better they suited him. He kept a pack o' dogs, and the men were encouraged to kick an' abuse 'em; but if one of 'em petted a dog, he was fired that instant — or else lured into a quarrel. The' did n't seem to be one single soft spot left in the man, an' when they got to callin' him Tyrant Jones instead of Tyrrel, why, it suited him all over, an' he used it himself once in a while.

The next time I saw Friar Tuck, he recognized me at first glance, an' his face lit up as though we had been out on some prank together an' was the best pals in the world ever since. He wanted to know all I knew about the crowd that had started to string him up; and when I had finished paintin' 'em as black as I could, what did he do but say that he was goin' up their way to have a talk with 'em.

I told him right out that it was simply wastin' time; but he was set in his ways, so I decided to ride part way with him. He had two hosses along this trip, with his bed an' grub tied on the spare one; and on the second day we reached a little park just as the sun was setting. It was one o' the most beautiful spots I ever saw, high enough to get a grand view off to the west, but all the rest shut in like a little room. He jumped from his hoss, had his saddle off as soon as I did, and also helped me with the pack. Then he looked about the place.

"What a grand cathedral this is, Happy!" he sez after a minute.

I did n't sense what he meant right at first, and went on makin' camp, until I happened to notice his expression. He was lookin' off to the west with the level rays of the sun as it sank down behind a distant range full in his face. The twilight had already fallen over the low land and all the hazy

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blues an' purples an' lavenders seemed to be floatin' in a misty sea, with here an' there the black shadows of peaks stickin' out like islands. It really was gorgeous when you stopped to give time to it.

It had been gruelin' hot all day, an' was just beginnin' to get cool an' restful, and I was feelin' the jerk of my appetite; but when I noticed his face I forgot all about it. I stood a bit back of him, half watchin' him, an' half watchin' the landscape. Just as the sun sank, he raised his hands and chanted, with his great, soft voice booming out over the hills: "The Lord is in His holy temple — let all the earth keep silence before Him."

He bent his head, an' I bent mine — I 'd have done it if the'd been a knife-point stickin' again' my chin. I tell you, it was solemn! It grew dark in a few moments an' the evening star came out in all her glory. It was a still, clear night without a speck in the air, and she was the only star in sight; but she made up for it, all right, by throwing out spikes a yard long.

He looked up at it for a moment, and then sang a simple little hymn beginnin', "Now the day is over, night is drawing nigh; shadows of the evening steal across the sky." It did n't have the ring to it of most of his songs; it was just close an' friendly, and filled a feller with peace. It spoke o' the little children, and those watchin' in pain, and the sailors tossin' on the deep blue sea, and those who planned evil — rounded 'em all up and bespoke a soothin' night for 'em; and I venture to say that it did a heap o' good.

Then he pitched in an' helped me get supper. This was his way; he did n't wear a long face and talk doleful; he was full o' life an' boilin' over with it every minute, and he 'd turn his hand to whatever came up an' joke an' be the best

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company in the world; but he never got far from the Lord; and when he 'd stop to worship, why, the whole world seemed to stop and worship with him.

We had a merry meal and had started to wash up the dishes when he happened to glance up again. He had just been tellin' me a droll story about the first camp he 'd ever made, and how he had tied on his pack so 'at the hoss could n't comfortably use his hind legs and had bucked all his stuff into a crick, an' I was still laughin'; but when he looked up, my gaze followed his. It was plumb dark by now, an' that evening star was fair bustin' herself, and the light of it turned the peaks a glisteny, shadowy silver. He raised his hands again and chanted one beginning: "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise His holy name."

The' was a part in this one which called upon all the works o' the Lord to praise Him, and I glanced about to see what was happenin'. A faint breeze had sprung up and the spruce trees were bowin' over reverently, the ponies had raised their heads and their eyes were shinin' soft and bright in the fire-light as they looked curiously at the singer; and as I stood there with a greasy skillet in my hand, something inside of me seemed to get down on its knees, to worship with the other works o' the Lord.

It was one o' those wonderful moments which seem to brand themselves on a feller's memory, and I can see it all now, and hear the Friar's voice as it floated away into the hills until it seemed to be caught up by other voices rather than to die away.

Well, we sat up about the fire a long time that night. He did n't fuss with me about my soul, or gettin' saved, or such things. I told him the things I did n't understand, and he

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told me the things he did n't understand; and I told him about some o' my scrapes, and he told me about some o' his, and — well, I can't see where it was so different from a lot of other nights; but I suppose I 'd be sitting there yet if he had n't finally said it was bedtime.

He stood up and looked at the star again, and chanted the one which begins: "Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace"; after which he pulled off some of his clothes and crawled into the tarp. I crawled in beside him about two minutes later; but he was already asleep, while I lay there thinkin' for the best part of an hour.

Next mornin' he awakened me by singin', "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning"; and after that we got breakfast, and he started on to Ty Jones's while I turned back to the Diamond Dot. I did n't think he 'd be able to do much with that gang; but after the talk I 'd had with him the night before, I saw 'at they could n't do much to him, either. I had got sort of a hint at his scheme of life; and there is n't much you can do to a man who does n't value his flesh more 'n the Friar did his.

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CHAPTER FOUR

TY JONES

Ty stood in his door as the Friar rode up, and he recognized him from the description Badger-face had turned in. Badger-face had been purty freely tongue-handled for not havin' lynched the Friar, and Ty Jones was disposed to tilt his welcome even farther back than usual; so he set his pack on the Friar. He had six dogs at this time, mastiffs with a wolf-cross in 'em which about filled out his notion o' what a dog ought to be.

The Friar had noticed the dogs, but he did n't have an idee that any man would set such creatures on another man; so he had dismounted to get a drink o' water from the crick, it havin' been a hot ride. The pack came surgin' down on him while he was lyin' flat an' drinkin' out o' the crick. His ponies were grazin' close by, and as soon as he saw 'at the dogs meant business, he vaulted into the saddle just in time to escape 'em.

They leaped at him as fast as they came up, and he hit 'em with the loaded end of his quirt as thorough as was possible. He was ridin' a line buckskin with a nervous disposition, and the pony kicked one or two on his own hook; but as the Friar leaned over in puttin' down the fifth, the sixth jumped from the opposite side, got a holt on his arm just at the shoulder, an' upset him out of the saddle. In the fall the dog's grip was broke an' he and the Friar faced each other for a moment, the Friar squattin' on one

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knee with his fists close to his throat, the dog crouchin' an' snarlin'.

As the dog sprang, the Friar upper-cut him in the throat with his left hand and when he straightened up, hit him over the heart with his right. He says that a dog's heart is poorly protected. Anything 'at did n't have steel over it was poorly protected when the Friar struck with his right in earnest. The dog was killed. One o' the dogs the pony had kicked was also killed, but the other four was able to get up and crawl away.

The Friar shook himself and went on to where Ty Jones and a few of his men were standin'. "That 's a nice lively bunch o' dogs you have," sez he, smilin' as pleasant as usual; "but they need trainin'."

"They suit me all right," growls Ty, "except that they 're too blame clumsy."

The Friar looked at him a minute, and then said drily, "Yes, that 's what I said; they need trainin'."

Ty Jones scowled: "They don't get practice enough," sez he. "It 's most generally known that I ain't a-hankerin' for company; so folks don't usually come here, unless they 're sure of a welcome."

"I can well believe you," said the Friar, laughin', "and I hope the next time I come I 'll be sure of a welcome."

"It 's not likely," sez Ty shortly.

The Friar just stood and looked at him curiously. He did n't believe that Ty could really mean it. The' was n't a streak of anything in his own make-up to throw light on a human actin' the way 'at Ty Jones acted; so he just stood and examined him. Ty stared back with a sneer on his face, and I 'm sorry I could n't have been there to see 'em eyein' each other.

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"Do you really mean," sez the Friar at last, "that you hate your fellow humans so, that you 'd drive a perfect stranger away from your door?"

"I have n't any use for hoss-thieves," sez Ty.

The Friar's face lighted. "Oh, that 's all right," sez he in a relieved tone. "As long as you have a special grievence again' me, why, it 's perfectly natural for you to act up to it. It would n't be natural for most men to act up to it in just this way, but still it 's normal; while for a man to set his dogs on a total stranger would be monstrous. I 'm glad to know 'at you had some excuse; but as far as hoss-stealin' goes, that roan is back with your band again. I saw him as I came along."

Ty was somewhat flabbergasted. He was n't used to havin' folks try out his conduct and comment on it right to his face; and especially was he shocked to have his morals praised by a preacher. He knew 'at such a reception as had just been handed to the Friar would have taken the starch out o' most men an' filled 'em with a desire for revenge ever after; but he could see that the Friar was not thinkin' of what had been handed to him, he was actually interested in himself, Ty Jones, and was honestly tryin' to see how it was possible for such a condition to exist; and this set Ty Jones back on his haunches for true.

"For all time to come," he sez slow and raspy, "I want you to leave my stuff alone. If you ever catch up and ride one of my hosses again, I 'll get your hide; and I don't even want you on my land."

Then the Friar stiffened up; any one in the world, or any thing, had the right to impose upon the Friar as a man; but when they tried to interfere with what he spoke of as his callin', why, he swelled up noticeable. The Friar's hu-

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mility was genuine, all right; but it was about four times stiffer an' spikier than any pride I've ever met up with yet.

"I shall not ride your hosses," sez he, scornful, "nor shall I tread upon your land, nor shall I breathe your air, nor drink your water; but in the future, as in the past, I shall use for the Lord only those things which belong to the Lord. The things which are the Lord's were His from the beginning, the things which you call yours are merely entrusted to your care for a day or an hour or a moment. I do not covet your paltry treasures, I covet your soul and I intend to fight you for it from this day forward."

The Friar spoke in a low, earnest tone; and Ty Jones stared at him. Ya know how earnest an insane man gets? Well, the' was something o' this in the Friar when he was talkin' business. You felt that he believed that what he was sayin' was the truth, and you felt that if it was the truth, it was mighty well worth heedin', and you also felt that in spite of its bein' so everlastin' different from the usual view o' things, it might actually be the truth after all and a risky thing to pass up careless.

After waitin' a minute without gettin' a reply, the Friar turned on his heel to walk away, stumbled, and slipped to the ground, and then they noticed a pool of blood which had dripped from him as he stood. He had forgotten that the dog had torn him, an' the men had looked into his eyes, as men always did when he talked, and they had forgot it, too. Now, when he fell, Olaf the Swede stepped forward to help him up.

Olaf was the best man 'at Ty Jones had, from Ty's own standpoint. Ty had happened to be over at Skelty's one night when Skelty was givin' a dance. Skelty had six girls

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at this time, an' he used to give a dance about once a week. Along about midnight, they got to be purty lively affairs. This night Skelty had bragged what a fine shot he was, an' the boys were kiddin' him about it, because Skelty was n't no shot at all as a rule. It was a moonlight night, and while they was sheepin' Skelty about his shootin', two strangers rode up, tied their hosses to the corral, an' started up the path toward the door.

Skelty looked at 'em an' sez, " Why, if I had a mind to, I could pick one o' those fellers off with this gun as easy as I could scratch my nose." He pulled his gun and held it over his shoulder.

All the boys fair hooted, an' Skelty dropped his gun an' shot one o' the strangers dead in his tracks. The other came along on the run with Skelty shootin' at him as fast as he could pop; but he only shot him once, through the leg, and he limped in an' made for Skelty with his bare hands. Skelty hit him in the forehead, knocked him down an' jumped on him. He kept on beatin' him over the head until the stranger managed to get a grip on his wrists. He held one hand still, an' puttin' the other into his mouth, bit off the thumb.

The's somethin' about bein' bit on the thumb which melts a man's nerve; and in about five minutes, the stranger had Skelty's head between his knees, and was makin' him eat his own gun. It must have been a hideous sight! Some say that he actually did make Skelty eat it, and some say that he only tore through the throat; but anyway, Skelty did n't quite survive it, and Ty Jones hired the stranger, which was Olaf the Swede.

Olaf was one o' those Swedes which seem a mite too big for their skins. The bones in his head stuck out, his jaws

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stuck out prodigious, his shoulders stuck out, his hands stuck out — he fair loomed up and seemed to crowd the landscape, and he was stouter 'n a bull. When he let himself go he allus broke somethin'; but he had a soft streak in him for animals, an' Ty never could break him from bein' gentle with hosses, nor keep him from pettin' the dogs once in a while. Olaf had n't no more morals 'n a snake at this time, an' when it came to dealin' with humans, he suited Ty to the minute; but he just simply would n't torture an animal, and that was the end of it. Olaf was n't a talkin' man; he never used a word where a grunt would do, and he was miserly about them; but he certainly was set in his ways.

The Friar had n't fainted, he had just gone dizzy; so when Olaf gave him a lift he got to his feet and walked to his horse. He allus carried some liniment an' such in his saddle bags, an' he pulled off his shirt and cleaned out the wound and tied it up, with Olaf standin' by and tryin' to help. Now, it made something of a murmur, when the Friar took off his shirt. In the first place, the dog had give him an awful tear, and for the rest, the Friar was a wonderful sight to behold. He was as strong as Olaf without bein' bulgey, and his skin was as white and smooth as ivory. He was all curves and tapers with medium small hands and feet, and a throat clean cut and shapely like the throat of a high-bred mare. Olaf looked at him, and nodded his head solemnly. Badger-face hated Olaf, because Olaf had a curious way of estimatin' things and havin' 'em turn out to be so, which made Ty Jones put faith in what Olaf said, over and above what any one else said.

As soon as the Friar had finished tyin' up the wound, he

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turned and walked up to Ty Jones. "Friend," he said, "I don't bear you a grain o' malice, and nothing you can ever do to me will make me bear you a grain o' malice. I know a lot about medicine, and perhaps I can help you that way sometime. I want to get a start with you some way; I want to be welcome here, and I wish 'at you 'd give me a chance."

"Oh, hell!" sneered Ty Jones. "Do you think you can soft-soap me as easy as you did the boys? You 're not welcome here now, and you never will be. I 've heard all this religious chatter, and there 's nothin' in it. The world was always held by the strong, by the men who hated their enemies and stamped them out as fast as they got a chance; and it always will be held by the strong. Your religion is only for weaklings and hypocrits."

The Friar's face lighted. "Will you discuss these things with me?" he asked. "I shall not eat until this scratch is healed, I have my own bed and will not bother you; won't you just be decent enough to invite me to camp here, give me free use of water, and grass for my hosses, while you and I discuss these things fully?"

"I told you I did n't want you about, and I don't," sez Ty. "The's nothin' on earth so useless as a preacher, and I can't stand 'em."

"Let me work for you," persisted the Friar. "All I ask is a chance to show 'at I 'm able to do a man's work, and all the pay I ask is a chance to hold service here on Sundays. If I don't do my work well, then you can make me the laughin' stock o' the country; but I tell you right now that if you turn me away without a show, it will do you a lot more harm than it will me."

Ty thought 'at probably the Friar had got wind o' some

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of his devilment, and was hintin' that his own neck depended on his men keepin' faith with him; so he stared at the Friar to see if it was a threat.

The Friar looked back into his eyes with hope beamin' in his own; but after a time Ty Jones scowled down his brows an' pointed the way 'at the Friar had come. "Go," sez he, stiff as ever. "The' ain't any room for you on the Cross brand range; and if ya try anything underhanded, I 'll hunt ya down and put ya plumb out o' the way."

So the Friar he caught his ponies and hit the back trail; but still it had been purty much of a drawn battle, for Ty Jones's men had used their eyes and their ears, and they had to give in to themselves 'at the preacher had measured big any way ya looked at him; while their own boss had dogged it in the manger to a higher degree 'n even they could take glory in.

As the Friar rode away, he sagged in his saddle with his head bent over; and they thought him faint from his wound; but the truth was, that he was only a little sad to think 'at he had lost. He was human, the Friar was; he used to chide himself for presumptin' to be impatient; but at the same time he used to fidget like a nervous hoss when things seemed to stick in the sand; and he did n't sing a note as long as he was on the Cross brand range — which same was an uncommon state for the Friar to be in, him generally marchin' to music.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE HOLD-UP

THIS was the way the Friar started out with us; and year after year, this was the way he kept up. He was friendly with every one, and most every one was friendly with him. Some o' the boys got the idea that he packed his guns along as a bluff; so they put up a joke on him.

They lay in wait for him one night as he was comin' up the goose neck. I, myself, did n't rightly savvy just how he did stand with regard to the takin' of human life in self-defence; but I knew mighty well 'at he was n't no bluffer, so I did n't join in with the boys, nor I did n't warn him; I just scouted along on the watch and got up the hill out o' range to see what would happen.

He came up the hill in the twilight, singin' one of his favorite marchin' songs. I 've heard it hundreds of times since then, and I 've often found myself singin' it softly to myself when I had a long, lonely ride to make. That was a curious thing about the Friar: he did n't seem to be tampin' any of his idees into a feller, but first thing the feller knew, he had picked up some o' the Friar's ways; and, as the Friar confided to me once, a good habit is as easy learned as a bad, and twice as comfortin'.

Well, he came up the pass shufflin' along at a steady Spanish trot as was usual with him when not overly rushed, and singin':

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"Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah!
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand."

He came up out of the pass with his head thrown back, and his boy's face shinin' with that radiatin' joy I have n't ever seen in another face, exceptin' it first caught the reflection from the Friar's; and the notion about died out o' the boys' minds. They were all friends of his and would n't have hurt his feelin's for a lot; but they had itched about his weapons for such a spell that they finally had to have it out; so when he rounded a point o' rock, they stepped out and told him to put his hands up.

They were masked and had him covered, and his hands shot up with a jerk; but he did n't stop his singin', and his voice did n't take on a single waver. Fact was, it seemed if possible a shade more jubilant. He had reached the verse which sez:

"Feed me with the heavenly manna
In this barren wilderness;
Be my sword and shield and banner,
Be the Lord my Righteousness";

and as he sang with his hands held high above his head, he waved 'em back and forth, playin' notes in the air with his fingers, the way he did frequent; and it was one o' the most divertin' sights I ever saw.

Those blame scamps had all they could do to keep from hummin' time to his song; for I swear to you in earnest that the Friar could play on a man's heart the same as if it was a fiddle. He kept on an' finished the last verse while I crouched above 'em behind a big rock, and fairly hugged myself with the joy of it. Ol' Tank Williams was a big man and had been chosen out to be the leader an' do the

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talkin', but he had n't the heart to jab into the Friar's singin'; so he waited until it was all over. Then he cleared his throat as though settin' off a blast of dynamite, and growls out: "Here, you, give us your money."

Ten six-shooters were pointin' at the Friar, but I reckon if he had known it would of exploded all of 'em, he 'd have had to laugh. He threw back his head and his big free laugh rolled out into the hills, until I had to gnaw at a corner o' the stone to keep from joinin' in. "My money!" sez he as soon as he could catch his breath. "Well, boys, boys, whatever put such a notion as that into your heads. Take it, take it, you 're welcome to it; and if you are able to find more than two bits, why, I congratulate you most hearty; because two bits was all I could find this morning, and that will only be a nickle apiece, and five cents is small pay for robbin' a volunteer missionary."

Ol' Tank Williams was a serious-minded old relic, and he was feelin' so sheepish just then that it seemed to him as though the Friar had imposed on him by lurin' him into such a fix; so he roars out in earnest: "If you ain't got no money, why the deuce do ya tote those guns about with ya all the time?"

"Would you just as soon tie me to a tree, or take some other measures of defence?" asked the Friar politely. "My arms are gettin' weary and I could talk more comfortable with 'em hanging' down."

"Aw put 'em down, and talk on," sez George Hendricks.

"Thank you," sez the Friar. "Well, now, boys, the man who does n't take the time to put a value on his own life, is n't likely to make that life very much worth while. He must n't overvalue it to such an extent that he becomes a coward, nor he must n't undervalue it to such an extent that

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he becomes reckless — he must take full time to estimate himself as near as he is able.

"I don't know that I can allus keep from judgin' my fellow men; but I am sure that I would not judge one to the extent of sayin' that my life was worth more than his, so I should never use a gun merely to save my own life by takin' away the life of another man — much less would I use a gun in defence of money; but I am a purty good shot, and sometimes I can get a man interested by shootin' at a mark with him. This is why I carry firearms. Do you want the two bits?"

"Aw, go on," yells ol' Tank, madder at himself 'n ever. "We did n't intend to rob ya. All we wanted was to hear ya sing and preach a bit"; and he pulled off his mask and shook the Friar's hand. All the rest o' the boys did the same; and I clumb up on my rock, flapped my wings, and crowed like a rooster.

Well, we sat on the ground, and he sang for us; and then he sobered and began to talk about cussin'. It used to hurt the Friar to hear some o' the double-jointed swear words we used when excited. He tried not to show it, because he did n't want anything to shut us away from him at any time; but whiles his face would wrinkle into lines of actual pain.

"Now, boys," he began, "I know, 'at you don't mean what you say in a profane way. You call each other terrible names, and condemn each other to eternal punishment; and if a man said these things in earnest, his life would be forfeit; but you take it merely as a joke. Now, I do not know just how wicked this is. I know that it is forbidden to take the name o' the Lord thy God in vain; so it is a dangerous thing to be profane even in thoughtlessness; but

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I have heard the Lord's name used by the perfectly respectable in a way which must have hurt his tender nature more.

"Once in the crowded slum district of a large eastern city, I saw a freight car back down on a child and kill it. The mother was frantic; she was a foreigner and extra emotional, and she screamed, and cursed the railroad. A man had come to comfort her, and he put his hand on her arm and said, 'My dear woman, you must not carry on this way. We must always bow our heads in submission to the Lord's will.'

"For years the poor people o' that neighborhood had begged protection for their children; and I cannot believe that it was the Lord's will that even one o' the least of 'em should have been slain in order to drive the lesson a little deeper home; so, as I said before, I am not going to talk to you of the wickedness of swearing — but I am goin' to talk about its foolishness, its vulgarity, and its brutality."

He went on showin' that swearin' was foolish because it was n't givin' a man's thought on things in a man's way; but merely howlin' it out the way wolves and wild-cats had to, on account o' their not havin' a civilized language with which to express the devilment which was in 'em. He showed how it made a feller lazy; because instead of tryin' to sort out words which would tell exactly what he meant, he made a lot of noises which had no more real meanin' than a bunch o' fire-crackers.

Then his voice got low and serious, and he said 'at the worst thing about cussin' was, that it led a feller into speakin' lightly about the sacred things of life. "When you speak the word 'son,'" he said, "you are bound to also call up the thought of 'mother'; and I want to say to you

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right now that any one who can be coarse and nasty in thinkin' or speakin' about maternity, is not a man at all — or even a decent brute — but has some sort of soul-sickness which is more horrible than insanity. Always be square with women — all women, good and bad. I know your temptations, and I know theirs. Woman has a heavy cross to carry, and the least we can do, is to play fair."

Then he sprang some of his curious theories on us: told us how the body was full of poisons and remedies; and it depended on our plan of livin', whether we used the one or the other. He said he allus cut out food and tobacco on Fridays, and if he did n't feel bright and clear and bubblin' over with vitality, he fasted until he felt able to eat a rubber boot, and then he knew he had cleaned all the waist products out of him, and could live at top speed again. He finished up by tellin' of a cross old doctor he once knew, who used to say 'at cattle and kings did n't have to control themselves; but all ordinary men had to use self-denial, even in matters of pleasure.

It was more the way the Friar said things than what he said; his voice and his eyes helped a lot; but the thing 'at counted for most was the fact 'at you knew it was n't none of it put on. He loved to joke when it was a jokin' matter; but he was stiff as stone with what he called the foundations of life. A man, you know, as a rule, is mighty timid about the things which lie close to his heart, no matter how bold and free he 'll talk about other things; but the Friar was like a little child, an' he 'd speak out as bold and frank as one, about the things he loved and hated, until he finally put a few drops o' this queer brand o' courage into our own hearts.

Of course we did n't get to be troubled with wing-growth

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or anything like that; but a short time after this fake hold-up, ol' Tank Williams went in to fill up with picklin'-fluid, and he started in on Monday and kept fightin' it all that week until Friday. Then he said that he would n't neither eat, drink, nor smoke on that day; and they could n't make him do it. He started in on Saturday to continue what had started out to be one o' the best benders he had ever took; but the first quart made him sick as a dog, and he came out to the ranch and said 'at the Friar had made him a temperate man, and for the rest of his life he intended to set aside one day a week in the Friar's favor.

After the boys had started for the ranch, the Friar invited me to spend the night with him; so we unpacked his bed from the lead-hoss and we built a little fire and had a right sociable time of it. Me and him was good pals by this time. He had said to me once: "Happy, you do more general thinkin' than some varsity men I 've known."

"I reckon," sez I, modest as I could, "that a man who has bossed a dozen men and ten thousand cattle through a three days' blizzard, has to be able to think some like a general."

Then he explained to me that general thinkin' meant to think about stars an' flowers an' the human race an' the past an' the future, an' such things, and not to be all the time lookin' at life just from the way it touched a feller himself. This was another thing I liked about him. Most Easteners is so polite that they have n't the heart to set a feller right when he has the wrong notion; but the Friar would divvy up on his knowledge as free as he would on his bacon or tobacco; so I opened myself up to him until he knew as much about me as I did myself.

He did n't have much use for the shut-eye this night, nor

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he was n't as talky as common; so we sat smokin' and lookin' into the fire for a long time. Once in a while he 'd speak a verse about some big deed a man had done years ago, or else one describin' the mountains or something like that; until finally I asked him how it came that a man who loved adventure an' fightin' an' feats of skill, the way he did, had selected to be a preacher.

"We don't select our lives, Happy," sez he. "You 're surely philosopher enough to see that. As far as we can see, it is like that gamblin' game; we roll down through a lot o' little pegs bobbin' off from one to another until finally we pop into a little hole at the bottom; but we did n't pick out that hole. No, we did n't pick out that hole."

So I up and asked him to tell me somethin' about his start.

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CHAPTER SIX

A REMINISCENCE

I PITY the man who has never slept out doors in the Rocky Mountains. Swingin' around with the earth, away up there in the starlight, he fills himself full o' new life with every breath; and no matter how tough the day has been, he is bound to wake up the next mornin' plumb rested, and with strength and energy fair dancin' through his veins. For it to be perfect, a feller has to have a pipe, a fire, and some one close and chummy to chat with. This night me an' the Friar both went down to the crick and washed our feet. We sat on a log side by side and made noises like a flock of bewildered geese when we first stuck our feet into the icy water; but by the time we had raced back and crawled into his bed, we were glowin' all over.

We did n't cover up right away, because the Friar just simply could n't seem to get sleepy that night; and after a minute he put some more wood on the fire, filled his pipe again, and said: "So you want me to tell you about my story, hu? Well, I believe I will tell you about my boyhood."

So I filled my pipe, and we lay half under the tarp with our heads on our hands and our elbows on our boots, which were waitin' to be pillows, and he told me about the early days, talkin' more to himself than to me.

"My mother died when I was six years old, my father divided his time between cleanin' out saloons, beatin' me,

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an' livin' in the work-house," began the Friar, and it give me kind of a shock. I 'd had a notion that such-like kids was n't likely to grow up into preachers; and I 'd allus supposed 'at the Friar had had a soft, gentle youth. "I was a tough, sturdy urchin," he went on, "but I allus had a soft heart for animals. I used to fight several times a day; but mostly because the other kids used to stone cats and tie tin cans on dogs' tails. I used to shine shoes, pass papers, run errands, and do any other odd job for a few pennies, and at night I slept wherever I could. I had a big dry-goods-box all to myself for several months, once, and I still look back to it as being a fine, comfortable bedroom.

"One morning I was down at the Union Depot when a farmer drove up a big Norman hoss hitched to a surrey. Some o' the other kids joshed him, called the hoss an elephant and asked where the rest o' the show was. The man was big, well fed, and comfortable lookin', same as the hoss, and he did n't pay any heed to the kids except to call one of 'em up to hold the hoss while he went into the depot. The kid wanted to know first what he was goin' to be paid, and he haggled so long 'at the farmer beckoned to me to come up. 'Will you hold my hoss for me a few minutes?' he asked.

"That big gray hoss with the dark, gentle eyes seemed to me one of the most beautiful things I had ever seen, and I was mighty anxious to have charge of him, even for a few minutes; so I sez, 'You bet I will.'

"The other kids roasted me and made all manner o' sport; but they knew I would fight 'em if they got too super-fluous, so after a bit they went on about their business. The's somethin' about man's love for a hoss that 's a little hard to understand. I had never had no intimate dealin's with

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one before, yet somethin' inside me reached out and entwined itself all about this big, gray, velvet-nosed beauty left in my charge. I reckon it must be in a man's blood; that's the only explanation I can find. All the way back along the trail o' history we find the bones of men and hosses bleachin' together in the same heap; and about every worthwhile spot on the face o' nature has been fought over on hossback, so it's small wonder if the feel of a hoss has got to be part of man's nature.

"The farmer had had a woman and a little girl in his care, to see off on the train, and he was gone some time. I had a few pennies in my pocket, and I bought an apple an' fed it to the hoss, gettin' more enjoyment out of it than out of airy other apple I'd ever owned. I can feel right now the strange movin's inside my breast as his moist nose sniffed at my fingers and his delicate lips picked up the bits of apple, as careful an' gentle as though my rough, dirty little hand had been made o' crystal.

"I was so interested in the hoss that I gave a start of surprise when the farmer's voice behind me sez: 'You seem to like hosses, son.'

"'I had n't no idee 'at a great big one like this could be so smooth an' gentle,' I said, with my hand rubbin' along the hoss's throat. 'I think he's a wonder.'

"'Do you like other animals?' asked the farmer.

"'I reckon I must be an animal myself,' sez I, 'because I allus get along well with them, while I have to fight a lot with humans.'

"'What do you want for tendin' to this hoss?' he asked me.

"'I don't want nothin',' sez I. 'We've got to be friends, an' I don't charge nothin' for doin' favors for a

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friend. Besides, he 's got so much sense, I doubt if he needs much watchin'.'

" The farmer grinned, looked into my eyes a long time, and gave me a dollar. ' Now tell me how you 'll spend your dollar,' sez he.

" Well, I was purty well floored. I had never owned a dollar before in my whole life, my father havin' taken away every cent he had ever found on me; and I stood lookin' at the coin, and hardly knowin' what to do. The farmer stood lookin' down at me with his eyes twinklin', and after a minute, I handed the dollar back to him. ' This is too much,' I sez. ' A dime would be plenty for the job, even if I did n't like the hoss; but if my old man would find a dollar on me, he 'd give me a beatin' for hidin' it from him, take it away, get drunk, and then give me another beatin' for not havin' another dollar.'

" So he asked me all about my father; and I told about him and about my mother bein' dead, and the twinkle left his eyes and they grew moist, so 'at he had to wink mighty fast.

" ' He told me that his own boy was dead and his girl married, and that the' was n't any children out at the big farm, and asked me if I would n't like to come and live with him. He told me about all the hosses an' the cows an' the pigs, an' that I could have a clean little room to sleep in, an' plenty o' food and clothes, and could go to school. It sounded like a fairy tale to me, and I sez, ' Aw go on, you 're just joshin' me '; but he meant it; so I got on the seat beside him, and as soon as we got out o' town he let me drive the big gray hoss — and I entered into a real world more wonderful than any fairy tale ever was.

" When we drove up the shady lane and into the big

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barn lot, a little old lady with sad eyes came to the door, and sez: 'Now, John, who is that with you?' and my heart sank, for I thought she was n't goin' to stand for me; but he took me by the hand and led me up to the door, put his arm about the little woman's shoulder, and sez with a tremble in his voice: 'This here is a little feller I 've brought out to be company for ya, mother. He has n't any folks, and he is fond of animals, and, and — his name is John, too.'

"At first she shook her head and shut her lips tight; but all of a sudden the tears came to her eyes, and she put her arms about me — and I had found a real home.

"Those were wonderful years, Happy, wonderful; and I have the satisfaction o' knowin' that I did them about as much good as they did me. Their hearts had been wrapped up in the boy, and he must have been a fine feller; but just when he had been promoted out o' the grammar grade at the head of his class, he had took the scarlet fever an' died. I was n't used to kindness when I went there; so I never noticed 'at they kept me out o' the inner circle o' their hearts at first. I called the little woman Mrs. Carmichael for some time; but one day after I 'd brought home a good report from school, I called her this, and she spoke to me sharp — I never knew any soft-hearted person in the world who got so much solid satisfaction out of actin' cross as she did. Well, she spoke to me sharp, and sez: 'John Carmichael, why don't you call me Mother?'

"I looked into her face, and it did n't look old any longer, and the sad look had left her eyes, and they were black and snappy an' full o' life; so I tried it; and we both broke into tears, but they were tears o' joy; and then he insisted that I call him Dad, and we became a family; and about the happiest one in the world, I reckon.

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"I rode the hosses bareback, shot hawks with my rifle, picked berries, did a lot o' chores, and worked hard with my books. It was a full, round life with lots of love and happiness in it, and I grew, body and mind and spirit, as free and natural as the big oak trees in the woods pasture.

"Mr. Carmichael had looked up my blood father and had done what he could for him; but it was no use, and one winter's morning he was found frozen in an alley. I did n't learn of it until the next June when he took me down to the city cemetery where my father and mother lay side by side. I did feel downcast as we all do in the presence of death; but it was n't my real father and mother who were lyin' there beneath the quiet mounds. Fatherhood and motherhood are somethin' more than mere physical processes. The real fathers and mothers are those who put the best part o' their lives into makin' the big, gloomy world into a tender home for *all* the little ones; and after my visit to the graveyard I felt drawn even closer to Dad and Mother than I had before.

"Children ought to have dogs and hosses and plenty of air and soil about 'em, Happy. We don't learn from preachin', we learn from example; and we can learn a heap from the animals. We talk about our sanitary systems; but we allus mean the sanitary systems outside our bodies. Now, the animals have sanitary systems, but they are inside their own skins, where they rightly belong. Look at the beautiful teeth of a dog — These come from eatin' proper food at the proper time and in proper quantities. If a dog is n't hungry, the dog won't eat. If a child is n't hungry, it is fed candy in a lot o' cases, and this is downright wicked. Of course the animals find it hard to live, crowded up the way man allus fixes things; but as a rule animals

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are temperate and clean, patient and honest, wise and strong; and I wish we 'd use 'em more as instructors for the young. Most mothers think a dog's tongue is dirty — Why, a dog's tongue is chemically clean, and healin' in its action; while the human mouth is generally poisonous — ask a dentist.

"And a cow's breath, after she has rolled in with sweetly solemn dignity from the clover field — Ah, that 's a pleasant memory! I 'll venture to say 'at mighty few monarchs have been as worthy o' bein' kissed before breakfast, as Nebukaneezer was while he was undergoin' punishment for his sins. I had gone to that farm with my soul all stunted and gnarly; but it straightened out and shot its little stems up toward the blue, the same as the stalks o' corn did.

"All I had as a start was a love of animals; and this is why I allus try to find the one soft spot in a man's nature — Even if it 's a secret vice, it is something to work on. This is what makes such a problem of Tyrrel Jones. I can't find out a single soft place in him; but I 'm goin' to get into the heart of him yet, if I can find the way.

"Well, Dad and Mother passed away within a week of each other a short time after I had been graduated. I had made up my mind to stay on the farm with 'em as long as they stayed; although all sorts of voices were callin' to me from the big outer world; but their daughter lived in the city, and had been weaned away from the farm, so she sold it, and I started on my pilgrimage.

"They had left me an income of three hundred and fifty dollars a year; and I determined to go to college. When I thought of how rich and full my own life had been made, after its stunted beginning, I wanted to do all I could to make the whole earth like that farm had been, and it

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seemed to me that the best way was to become a priest of the Lord. I tried my best; but I have been consid'able of a failure, Happy. Now, I hardly know where I stand. I am sort of an outcast now, and just doing what seems best on my own hook.

"A lot of my ideals have been lost, a lot of my hopes have faded, a lot of my work has seemed like sweeping back the waves of the sea; but for all I have lost, new things have taken their place, and I have never lost my faith in the Lord. Now, I am weak in doctrine and a stranger to dogma; and the things for which I fight with all my soul and heart and strength, are kindliness and decency.

"As long as one bein' in the world is cold or hungry or diseased, every other bein' is liable to become hungry and cold and diseased. What I am fighting for is a world without poverty. Most o' the ills of life spring from poverty, and poverty is the result of selfishness and greed. The earth is reeking with riches, but its bounty is not divided fairly.

"Happy, if I could only hold up the Lord, so that all men might see the beauty and fullness of Him, the glory and grandeur of His simple life and His majestic self-sacrifice, the fleeting cheapness of material things would sink to their real value, and we would all become one great family, workin' together in peace and contentment. Now, go on to sleep."

It was purty late by this time sure enough, and I fell asleep soon after this; but I awakened durin' the night and found myself alone. It was cold when I stuck my nose out from under the tarp, but it was a wonderful night, clear and still, with the stars swingin' big and bright just above my reach.

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As I lay there, I heard Friar Tuck singin' softly to himself out where the trail dipped down into the valley:

> "The night is dark, and I am far from home,
> Lead Thou me on!
> Keep Thou my feet: I do not ask to see
> The distant scene, — one step enough for me."

I had never heard his voice so wonderfully beautiful before; but, my stars, the sadness of it made me choke! It was n't just a song, it was a cry; and I knew that it came from a lonely, bleedin' heart. I put my head under the covers again, puzzlin' over what was on his mind; but first thing I knew I was awakened by the glad voice of the old Friar Tuck, singin' his favorite mornin' hymn: "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning"; so I cooked breakfast, and he went his way, and I went mine.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

HORACE WALPOLE BRADFORD

THE Diamond Dot, while it was about the idealest ranch in the West from most standpoints, was run a little loose. Jabez did n't have any luxurious tastes, and he was n't miserly; so he did n't strain things down to the last penny — not by a whole lot. All he asked was to have his own way and be comfortable; and so he allus kept more punchers 'n he had actual need of, and unless they got jubilant over imposin' on him, he just shut his eyes and grinned about it.

Takin' his location and outfit into account, and he just simply could n't help but make money; so we all had a fairly easy time of it and grew tender feelin's, the same as spoiled children; which is why we sometimes quit, for we never had any other excuse for it.

Barbie was a notice-takin' child, if ever the' was one; and she stood out for company as a general and standin' order. Company did n't affect ol' Cast Steel one way or the other; they were just the same to him as a couple o' hundred head o' ponies, more or less; and so the news got out that we allus had a lot of extra beds made up and any one was welcome to stretch out in 'em who wanted to. The result o' this was, 'at we drew visitors as easy as molasses draws flies. I lived at the home house on account o' bein' Barbie's pal, and so I got into the habit o' bein' a sort of permanent reception committee. Some o' these visitors was

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a plague to me; but Jabez did n't like to run any risk of havin' 'em ruined beyond repair, so it was generally understood that I had to use ex-treme caution when I started in to file the clutch off their welcome.

This spring 'at I have in mind, we had as visitor one o' the easternest dudes I was ever tangled up with. He came out for his health, which is the excuse most of 'em gives; but this one took more ways of avoidin' health 'n airy other of 'em I ever saw. He smoked cigars all day long, big black ones, strong enough to run a sawmill, he ate fattenin' food from mornin' till night, and when he drove out in the buckboard to take his exercise, he suffered from what he called fatigue. He used to sit up as wide awake as an owl till along about ten every night; and half the time he did n't crawl out until near seven in the mornin'. He certainly was a pest!

What he complained of most, was his nerves; and he 'd sit for hours, talkin' about 'em to anything 'at had ears. He said the worst of it was, he could n't sleep nights. I had, of course, heard o' nerves before ever I saw him; but I had never heard of 'em turnin' to and devilin' a man, the way his did; so at first I was honestly interested, and asked him all I could think up about 'em; but after a day or so, I 'd 'a' been perfectly willin' to put up the coin out o' my own pocket to have him go to a dentist and have every last one of his nerves pulled.

I don't begrudge sympathy to any afflicted individual; but the more I sympathized with this feller, the more affectionate toward me he got; and he used to trot about after me, warbilin' out dirges about his nerves until I was tempted to tie a stone around his neck and lose him down the cistern.

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He ran to language, too, this one did. His conversation was so full of it that a feller could scarcely understand what he was tryin' to say. He was ferociously interested in the ancient Greeks; and if a man succeeded in wedgin' him away from his nerves, he began immediate to discourse about these ancient Greeks. Now, I did n't have a single thing again' any o' these ancient Greeks before this Dude struck us, none of 'em ever havin' crossed my trail before; but they sure did have a rotten outfit o' names, and they were the most infernal liars 'at ever existed. Three-headed dogs, and women with snakes for hair, were as common in their tales as thieves among the Sioux. Barbie did n't have any use for this Eastener either; so I decided to fit him out with a deep-rooted desire for home influences.

I took ol' Tank Williams into my confidence, he bein' the most gruesome lookin' creature we had in our parts. He was a big man of curious construction and he had one eye which ran wild. Tank never knew what this free eye was up to; and while he would be examinin' the ground, the free eye would be gazin' up at a tree as intent as though he had set it to watch for a crow. Durin' his younger days, Tank had formed the habit of indulgin' in gang fights as much as possible, and all of his features had been stampeded out o' their natural orbits; but this free eye beat anything I ever see.

They had him down on his back one time, and he was gnawin' away contentedly at some feller's thumb, when the feller reached up his trigger finger and scooped out Tank's eye. The shape and color were n't hurt a bit; but some o' the workin' parts got disconnected, so that he could n't see with it; but it appeared to be full as good an eye as the one he looked with.

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All the sleep Tank ever wanted was six hours out o' the twenty-four, and he did n't care how he got 'em — ten minutes at a time, or all in one lump. He could sleep sittin' up straight, or ridin', or stretched out in bed, or most any way. I think he could sleep while walkin,' though I was never able to surprise him at it. He agreed to back me up, and Spider Kelley also said he was willin' to do everything in his power to furnish our guest some pleasant recollections after he 'd gone back to a groove which fitted him better.

As soon as I began to plan my trip, I started to rehearse curious secrets about Tank to the Eastener, whose name was Horace Walpole Bradford. I told Horace that Tank had a case o' nerves which made his'n seem like a bundle of old shoe-laces; and that if something was n't done for him soon, I feared he was goin' to develop insanity. I said that even now, it was n't safe to contrary him none, and that I 'd be a heap easier in my own mind if Tank was coralled up in a cell somewhere, with irons on.

I did n't tell Tank what sort of a disposition I was supplyin' him with for fear he 'd overdo it. Tank did n't know a nerve from an ingrowin' hair; but when he and Horace paired off to tell each other their symptoms, I 'll have to own up that his tales of anguish an' sufferin' made Horace's troubles sound like dance music.

I told Horace that a trip through the mountains would soothe and invigorate him, until he 'd be able to sleep, hangin' by his toes like a bat; but the trouble was to find something which interested him enough to lure him on the trip. There was a patent medicine almanac at the place, and I studied up its learnin' until I had it at my tongue's end, and I also used a lot o' Friar Tuck's health theories;

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so that I got Horace interested enough to talk my ear-drums callous; but not enough to take the trip.

I did n't know much about nerves; but I was as familiar with sleep as though I had graduated from eleven medical colleges, and I knew if he would just follow my directions, it would give him such an appetite for slumber that he 'd drop into it without rememberin' to close his eyelids. Ol' Jabez happened to mention an Injun buryin' ground with the members reposin' on top o' pole scaffolds, and this proved to be the bait. Horace wanted to see this, and it was a four days' drive by buckboard; so I heaved a sigh o' relief and prepared to do my duty.

When all was ready, we packed our stuff in the good buckboard, putting in an extra saddle for the accident we felt sure was goin' to happen. Spider started as driver, while I rode behind, leadin' a horse with Tank's saddle on, though Horace thought it was Spider's. We had told him that it made our backs ache to ride in a buckboard all day, so we would change off once in a while. Horace wanted to do the drivin' himself; but we pointed out that he was n't used to our kind o' roads, and consequently favored the little hills too much. He was inhumanly innocent, and it was almost like feedin' a baby chalk and water.

We trotted along gentle, until the rear spring came loose goin' down a little dip to a dry crick bed, about ten miles out. We talked it over and decided 'at the best plan would be for Spider to drive back and get the old buckboard; so after unloadin' our stuff, I took the tap out o' my pocket, fixed the spring, tied a rope about it to deceive Horace, and Spider drove back for the old buckboard which had been discarded years before, but which we had fixed up for this trip and painted until it looked almost safe to use.

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Before long we saw the buckboard comin' back; but much to our surprise, Tank Williams was drivin' it, an' givin' what he thought was the imitation of a nervous man. He would stand up an' yell, crack his mule-skinner, and send the ponies along on a dead run. He came up to us, and said that he had had an attack o' nerves, had n't slept a wink the night before; and when Spider Kelley had refused to let him go in his place, he had torn him from the seat an' had trampled him.

"I trampled him," sez Tank solemnly, his free eye lookin' straight into the sun. "I hope I did n't destroy him; but in my frenzy I trampled him."

Horace looked worried. "Tank," sez I soothin'ly, "we don't really need any one else along. You just help us to load, an' then go back, like a good feller."

Tank stood up on the seat, an' held the whip ready. "My life depends on me takin' this trip!" he yelled. "My life depends on it; it depends on it, I tell you. My life depends on me takin' this trip!"

He went on repeatin' about his life dependin' on his takin' that trip, until I made a sign to Horace, and said 'at we 'd better let him go along. Horace was n't ambitious to be trampled; so he concluded to concur, an' climbed into the seat beside Tank. Any one else would 'a' noticed that it was Tank's saddle on the hoss I was leadin'; but Horace never noticed anything which was n't directly connected with his own body. He did n't even have any idee that the sun had set habits in the matter o' risin' an' settin' — which was another fact I had took into account.

We were drivin' four broncs to the buckboard, an' they was new to the game and in high spirits. Tank was also in high spirits, an' we went at a clip which was inspirin', even

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to sound nerves. We did our level' best to give Horace somethin' real to worry about, an' from the very start his nerves was so busy handin' in idees an' sensations that his mind was took up with these instead of with the nerves themselves as was usual.

Well, we sure had a delightful ride that afternoon: every time 'at Horace would beseech Tank to be more careful in swingin' around down-hill curves, Tank would seize him by the arm with his full squeezin' grip, an' moan: "It 's my nerves, my pore nerves. This is one o' the times when I 'm restive, I got to have action; my very life depends on it! Whoop, hit 'em up — Whee!" an' he 'd crack his mule-skinner about the ears o' the ponies, an' we 'd have another runaway for a spell.

Horace had n't the mite of an idee in which direction he was travelin'; all he did was to hang on and hope. The confounded buckboard was tougher 'n we had figured on, and it did n't bust until near dark. As they went up the slope, I could see the left hind wheel weavin' purty rapid, an' as they tore down the grade to Cottonwood Crick, things began to creak an' rattle most threatenin'. We had decided to camp on the crick, an' Tank swung up his team with a flourish. The hind wheel could n't stand the strain, an' when it crumbled, Horace, an' the rest o' the baggage, whip-crackered off like a pinwheel. Of course when one wheel went, the others dished in company, an' the whole thing was a wreck.

The ponies were comfortable weary, an' after I had roped one an' the rest had fallen over him, we soothed 'em down without much trouble, an' started to make camp. Horace was all in, an' was minded to sit on his shoulder blades an' rest; but this was n't part o' the plan, an' we made him

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hustle like a new camp-boy. As soon as supper was over, he lit a cigar, an' prepared to take a rest. We had decided that those big, black cigars was n't best for his nerves, so we had smuggled out the box, an' had worked a little sulphur into all but the top row. He lit his cigar and gave us one apiece, but he was so sleepy he could n't keep his on fire; and it was comical to watch him.

Every time he 'd nod off, Tank would utter an exclamation, an' walk up an' down, rubbin' his hands an' cussin' about his nerves. Horace was dead tired from bein' jounced about on the buckboard all day; but he was worried about Tank, an' this would wake him effectual.

About ten o'clock I sez: "Tank, what happened that night when you got nervous up in the Spider Water country?"

"Oh, don't ask me, don't ask me," sez Tank, gittin' up an' walkin' off into the darkness.

"I wish to glory he had n't come along," I sez to Horace. "I fear we 're goin' to have trouble; but chances are that a good night's rest 'll quiet him, all right."

Purty soon Tank came back, lit his pipe, an' sat facin' Horace with his lookin' eye, an' everything else in the landscape with his free one. "You know how it is with nerves," he sez to Horace. "You perhaps, of all them I have ever met up with, know how strained and twisted nerves fill a man's heart with murder, set his teeth on edge and put the taste of blood in his throat; so I 'm goin' to tell the whole o' that horrid experience, which I have never yet confided to a livin' soul before. Have you got a match?"

Tank's pipe allus went out at the most interestin' times; and he could n't no wise talk without smokin'. We all knew this; so whenever Tank got headed away on a tale, we

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heaved questions at him, just to see how many matches we could make him burn. He 'd light a match and hold it to his pipe; but he allus lit off an idee with the match, and when he 'd speak out the idee, he 'd blow out the match. Or else he 'd be so took up by his own talkin', he 'd hold the match until it burnt his fingers; then, without shuttin' off his discourse, he 'd moisten the fingers on his other hand, take the burnt end of the match careful, and hold it until it was plumb burnt up, without ever puttin' it to his pipe. I did n't want to waste matches on this trip so I told Horace to hand Tank his cigar. Horace had already wasted two cigars, besides the ones he had given us; and I wanted him to get to the sulphur ones as soon as convenient.

Tank's mind was preoccupied with the tale we had made up; so he took Horace's fresh cigar, lit his pipe by it, threw the cigar into the fire, and said moodily: "He was unobligin'. Yes, that cross-grained old miner was unobligin'. Of course, I would n't have done it if I had n't been nervous; but I say now, as I 've allus thought, that he brought it on himself by bein' unobligin'."

Tank's gloomy tones had wakened Horace up complete; and as he started to light another cigar, I got ready for bed. "You two have already got nerves," I sez to 'em; "but I don't want to catch 'em, so I 'll sleep alone, and you can bunk together." I unrolled my tarp close to the fire and crawled into it, intendin' to take my rest while I listened to Tank unfold his story.

It was a clean, fresh night, just right for sleepin'; and it almost seemed a shame to put that innocent little Eastener through his treatment; but it was for his own good so I stretched out with a sigh o' content, and looked at the other two by the fire.

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Horace was short and fat around the middle with stringy arms and legs. He wore some stuff he called side-burns on his face. They started up by his ears, curved along his jaws and were fastened to the ends of his stubby mustache. He kept 'em cropped short and, truth to tell, they were an evil-lookin' disfigurement, though he did n't seem to feel a mite o' shame at wearin' 'em. His face was full o' trouble, and yet he was so sleepy he had to hitch his eyebrows clear up to his hair to keep his eyes open. Tank's face never did have what could rightly be called expressions. His features used to fall into different kinds o' convulsions; but they were so mussed up it was impossible to read 'em. I looked at these two a minute, and then I had to pull my head under the tarp to keep from laughin'.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

A CASE OF NERVES

"I WAS all alone," sez Tank. "I had been up in the Spider Water country lookin' for a favorite ridin' pony; but my hoss broke a leg, and I packed my saddle and stuff on my head until my nerves began to swell. Then I threw the stuff away and hunted for a human. I roamed for weeks without comin' across a white man, and my nerves got worse an' worse. You know how it is with nerves; how they set up that dull ache along the back o' your spinal cord until you get desperate, and long to bite and scratch and tear your feller-bein's to pieces — well, I had 'em worse this time 'n ever I had 'em before; and they loosened up my brain-cells until my self-control oozed out and I longed to fling myself over a cliff. Have you got a match?"

Horace passed over his fresh cigar, and Tank lit his pipe and tossed this cigar into the fire also. Horace looked at it sadly for a moment; but he was game, and lit another.

"Finally," sez Tank, "I came upon a lonely cabin at the bottom of a gorge; and in it was a little man who was minin' for gold. He was about your build, except that toilin' with pick and shovel had distributed his meat around to a better advantage, and he wore his whiskers complete, without any patch scraped off the chin. It was just night when I reached the cabin, and he invited me in to eat; which I am free to say I did until I was stuffed up to my swaller, and then we prepared to sleep.

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"Now, a feller would nachely think I'd 'a' gone right to sleep; but instead o' this, my nerves began to twist an' squirm an' gnaw at me until I was almost beside myself; and after fightin' it for several hours, I woke up the miner, and asked him as polite as a lady, if he would n't rub my brow for a few minutes. Seems like when I 'm nervous, the' won't nothin' soothe me so quick as to have my brow rubbed; but this little coyote refused pointblank to do it.

"I finally got down on my knees and begged him to; but he still refused. He said he had fed me six meals at once and given me shelter, and this was as far as he 'd go if my confounded nerves exploded and blew the place up. I was meek about it, I tried my best to ward off trouble; but just then a nerve up under my ear gave a wrench which twisted me all out o' shape, and I lost patience. I seized that little cuss by the beard and I yanked him out on the floor, and I said to him —"

Tank had once been unusual gifted in framin' up bright-colored profanity, but he had been shuttin' down on it since the night he had helped to fake the hold-up on the Friar, and I thought he had lost the knack. This night, though, he seemed to find a spiritual uplift in tellin' to Horace exactly what he had said to the lonely miner. Before he finished this part, he had used up all of Horace's good cigars, as lighters, and the Eastener's face had turned a palish blue. I 'd be willin' to bet that Tank made the swearin' record that night; though of course, the' ain't any way to prove it.

When Tank could n't think of any new combinations, he covered his face and broke into tears. Horace sat and looked at him with his eyes poppin' out. "Don't you think you could go to sleep?" he asked after a bit.

"Sleep!" yelled Tank. "Sleep? I doubt if I ever do

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sleep again. I feel worse right now 'n I did that night in the gorge."

"What did you finally do that time?" asked Horace.

"I hate to think of it," sez Tank; and he put his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hands, and stared into the fire as though seein' ghosts.

Horace watched him a while, and then he lit a cigar out of the second layer. He took one puff and then removed the cigar and stared at it. He tried another puff, and then threw it into the fire, where it spluttered up in a blue flame. He tried six more, and then said somethin' I could n't quite catch and threw the whole box into the fire; while Tank continued to stare into it as though he had forgot the' was any one else on earth.

"Let 's go to bed," sez Horace.

"Have you got a match?" sez Tank, lookin' around with a start. Horace took a burnin' stick from the fire, and Tank lit his pipe with it; and from that on Horace kept a lighted stick handy.

"How in thunder did you get to sleep that night in the gorge?" demanded Horace, who was gettin' impatient.

"Well," sez Tank, "after I had told this unobligin' little cuss exactly what I thought of him, he pulled out a gun and tried to shoot me — actually tried to shoot me in his own cabin, where I was his guest. My feelin's were hurt worse 'n they 'd ever been hurt before; but still I tried to calm myself; and if it had n't been for my nerves, I 'd have gone out into that gorge in the dead o' night, and never set eyes on his evil face again.; but I could n't get control of myself, so I took his gun away from him and knocked him down with it. When he regained consciousness, he was in a repentant mood; and he consented to rub my head.

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"He rubbed my head a while an' I sank into a dreamless, health-given repose; but as soon as I was asleep, the traitorious sneak crept out an' started to run. I fled after him as swift as I could, an' caught him about two A. M. I had to twist his arms to make him come back with me; but when I had once got him back to the shack, I tied him good an' tight, an' made him rub my brow again. When he 'd rub slow an' gentle, I 'd sleep peaceful an' quiet; but the minute he 'd quit, why, I 'd wake up again; so he rubbed an' rubbed an' rubbed" — Tank smoothed his left hand gentle with his right, an' spoke slow an' whispery — "an' I slept an' slept an' slept an' —"

The darn cuss said it so soothin' an' natural, that hanged if I did n't fall asleep myself, though the last I remember, I was bitin' my lips so I could stay awake an' see the fun. I must have been asleep full an hour before I was woke up by Tank's voice, raised in anger. I stuck my nose out o' the tarp, an' there was Tank kneelin' straddle o' the other bed which he had rolled up in the shape of a man. Horace was standin' close by with his hands on his hips an' lookin' altogether droopy.

"I raised his head from the floor, like this," said Tank, illustratin' with the bed, "an' then I beat it down on the planks o' the floor; an' then I raised it up again, an' then I beat it down, an' then I raised it up —"

I had to stuff a corner o' the soogan into my mouth to keep from laughin' out loud at the expression in Horace's eyes; but Tank kept raisin' that poor head an' beatin' it down again for so long that I fell asleep again without intendin' to.

The next time I woke up Horace was speakin'. He was so earnest about it that at first I thought he had been

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weepin'; but he was simply tryin' to make his voice winnin' an' persuadish.

"I 'll rub it," he sez. "I 'll rub it soft an' gentle, just like you say you want it rubbed. Come on, let me rub it." I looked at Tank with his free eye rollin' about as though it was follerin' the antics of a delirious mosquito; and I 'd just about as soon have rubbed the brow of a porcupine; but Horace was all perked up with sympathy.

"No," sez Tank, sadly. "You 're a guest, an' it would n't be polite. If you was a stranger, now, why, I 'd choke your heart out but what I made you rub it; but not a guest. No, I could n't do that. I 'd wake Happy up an' make him rub it; but he allus sleeps with a gun under his head, an' he 's apt to shoot before he 's full awake."

"Well, just let me try it a while," sez Horace.

"I 'm feared to," sez Tank, beginnin' to weaken. "If you was to start, an' I was to fall asleep, an' you was to quit, I might dream 'at you was that unobligin' man which betrayed me back in the lonely shack; an' I might strangle you or somethin' before I came to my senses. Nope, the best plan is just to sit an' chat here till daylight. My nerves is allus better after sun-up."

"I don't think I can stay awake much longer," sez Horace, almost whimperin'.

"What?" sez Tank in surprise. "You claim to have nerves, an' yet you can talk o' fallin' asleep at this time o' night. Great Scott, man, you ain't got no nerves! You are as flebmatic as a horn toad. Oh, I wish I could just fall sleepy for one minute."

"Let me try rubbin' your brow," sez Horace, whose eyes were blinkin' for sleep, but whose face was all screwed up

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into lines of worry at what was goin' to happen to him after he had finally give in an' drifted off.

" Well," sez Tank, " I 'll let you try; but if you 're already sleepy, I doubt if any good comes of it. You sit there at the head o' the bed, an' I 'll lay my head in your lap, an' you rub my brow soft an' gentle. If I do get to sleepin' natural, why o' course the' won't be no harm done in you takin' a few winks; but for the love o' peace, don't sleep sound."

I blame near choked while they were gettin' settled, 'cause Horace was one o' those finicky cusses, an' Tank's head looked like a moth-eaten buffalo robe. Finally, however, Tank stretched out with the covers up around his neck an' his head pillowed in Horace's lap, and then Horace began to rub his brow as soft an' gentle as he knew how.

" You don't do it clingy enough," sez Tank. " You want to just rest your fingers lightly, but still have 'em draw along so 'at they 'll give a little tingle. There, that 's better. Now then, I 'll lay as quiet as I can, an' try to go to sleep." Tank was doin' such an earnest job, he had plumb fooled himself into believin' it was mostly true.

He gave a start after layin' quiet for five or ten minutes, an' this put Horace on edge again; but Tank did n't wake up. Horace had a saddle blanket around his shoulders; and the last I saw just before I fell asleep, myself, was Horace gently rubbin' Tank's brow, an' lookin' down careful for a change of expression. They made a curious sight with the firelight back of 'em.

It was grayin' up for the dawn next time I woke up; and I 'd had my sleep out, but when I stuck my nose out from under the tarp, I found it purty tol'able frosty. I knew it was my duty to roust out an' keep Horace from gettin' more sleep 'n my treatment for his nerves called for; but I was

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too comfortable to pay much heed to the still, small voice of duty. At the same time I was curious to see what my boon comrades was up to, so I stretched my neck an' took a look at 'em.

Horace had keeled over so that his elbow rested on Tank's chest an' his head rested on his hand; but the other hand was still on Tank's brow, an' I reckon Horace must have rubbed until he did n't care whether it was sleep or death he drew, just so he got rid o' keepin' awake. Tank had reached up one hand so it circled Horace's waist; and they made the most lovable group a body ever see.

While I was still watchin' 'em, Horace's arm gave out, an' he settled down on top o' Tank's nose. In about two minutes Tank came to with a jump, an' heaved Horace to the foot of the bed. Tank was really startled, an' he came to his feet glarin'. "You blame little squab, you!" he yelled. "What are you tryin' to do — smother me?"

Horace staggered to his feet, but he could n't get his eyes open more 'n a narrow slit. "I did n't do it on purpose, Mr. Williams," he blubbled like a drunk man. "I rubbed until I thought my hand would fall off at the wrist; but I reckon I must 'a' dropped asleep. Lie down again, an' I 'll rub you some more."

"Too late," sez Tank, "too late, too late. I never can sleep while daylight 's burnin'; but still, my nerves don't get so dangerous until after nightfall; so we 'll just turn to an' get breakfast."

Well, I got up after yawnin' a few times; and after askin' if they had had a restful night, I started to get breakfast. Horace staggered about, gettin' wood an' water an' doin' what he was able to, while Tank wrangled in the hosses.

After breakfast, which I must say for Horace, he et in

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able shape, we started to saddle up, puttin' the spare saddle on the hoss I had rode the day before. "Which one o' you is goin' back after the other buckboard?" asked Horace.

"Why, we ain't goin' back at all," sez I. "It 's full fifty miles, an' we can't keep switchin' buckboards every day on a trip like this. We 'll just ride the ponies the rest o' the way."

"Ride?" sez Horace. "Ride!"

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CHAPTER NINE

TREATING THE CASE

HORACE started to enlarge on how much he did n't know about ridin'; but Tank breaks in with a plea for his nerves. "Look here," he said, scowlin' at Horace with his good eye, while the free one rove around wild in his face, "your nerves are a little out o' fix, an' mine is plumb tied into knots. This here outin' will be the best thing we can do for ourselves, an' you got to come along. No matter which way you go, you got to ride; so the' ain't no sense in makin' a fuss about it. We 'll mount you up on as gentle a cayuse as the' is in the West; an' we won't tell no one if you hang on to the saddle horn goin' down hill."

"That 's right, Mr. Bradford," sez I respectful. "You 'd have to ride back anyway, so you might as well come on with us an' have a pleasant outing."

"Besides," sez Tank, "up there in the Wind River country we stand a chance o' gettin' somethin' for our nerves, if the Injuns happen to be in a good humor. Those Injun doctors know all about hurbs an' which diseases they grow for, an' when they 're in a good humor, they 'll sell ya some."

"What 'll they do if they 're not in a good humor?" asked Horace.

"Well, that 's the beatin'est question I 've yet heard!" sez Tank. "How does any one know what an Injun 'll do when he 's not in a good humor? I don't reckon any one

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ever tried to learn the answer to that question. When an Injun 's not in a good humor, either you 've got to kill him or he 'll kill you. If we hear tell 'at they 're out o' humor, we 'll simply scurry back at the first hint, an' don't you forget it."

Horace was n't resigned yet; so he kept sawin' away with his questions all the time we were tyin' on the beds an' grub. The grass had been purty brown down below, but it was fat an' green up above, an' the ponies felt fine. We had picked out good ones, an' it took some time to get 'em wore down to where they was willin' to pack; but by seven o'clock we were ready to start, an' then Tank lifted Horace into the saddle, while I held the pony's head. We had chose a steady old feller for Horace, because we did n't want any serious accidents. Ol' Cast Steel was dead again' sheepin' the Easteners, an' I knew they 'd be doin's about what we 'd done already, let alone havin' any sort of a mishap.

We told Horace just what to do to save himself, an' we fixed his stirrups to just fit him; but he took it purty hard. It takes a ridin'-man a couple•o' weeks to harden up after he 's laid off a spell; but when a man begins to do his first ridin' at forty, it comes ex-tremely awkward. Horace was the first feller I ever saw get sea-sick on hossback; but he certainly did have a bad attack. I suppose it was the best thing 'at could have happened to him, an' after he was emptied out, he rode some easier. We only covered about thirty miles that day altogether, an' Tank had plenty o' time to get all the sleep he could use; but when he came to lift Horace down from the saddle, Horace could n't make his legs stiff enough to stand on.

We let him stretch out while we were makin' camp; but he fell asleep, so we had to wake him up to help get supper.

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I was beginnin' to feel sorry for him, but he had pestered us regardless about his nerves, an' I knew 'at pity for him now would be the worse for him in the long run.

After supper, Horace spent consid'able time in bewailin' his fate because he had got disgusted an' thrown his whole box o' cigars into the fire. "I 've got an extra pipe, if you 'd like to try that," sez Tank. "It 's lots better for the nerves than cigars — though from what I can tell o' you, you ain't bothered much with nerves. I wish to glory I was in your skin."

"Oh, man," sez Horace, "you can't imagine how I suffer. I ache like a sore tooth all over, an' it gives me a cute pain just to sit here on the grass."

"Sit on the saddle-blankets," sez Tank, sympathetic. As soon as Horace had piled up the blankets an' sat down on 'em, groanin' most bitter, Tank sez with feelin': "Gee, how I envy you. You have nothin' but a few muscle-aches and chafed skin an' such, while my nerves is beginnin' to threaten me again. I 'm not goin' to bother either o' you fellers, though. I 'm goin' to have you tie me to a tree to-night if I can't sleep."

Horace filled the pipe, which was an ancient one, bitter as gall; but when he began to smoke, his face became almost satisfied. The pipe was purty well choked up, so that he had some bother in keepin' it goin', but after we 'd run a grass stem through it, it worked purty well, an' we was right sociable until along about nine o'clock, when I got sleepy, myself. Then Tank began to worry about his nerves. Horace had about forgot his own nerves, he was sufferin' so from Tank's.

When we see that Horace could n't keep awake any longer without bein' tortured, Tank began to carry on fiercer. He

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rumpled up his hair, gave starts an' jerks, but the thing 'at worked best, was just to sit an' look at his fingers, an' pick at 'em. He 'd form a circle with his left thumb and forefinger, then poke his right finger through this circle and try to grab it with his right hand before it could back out. It was the craziest thing I 'd ever seen; but before long Horace got to tryin' it himself. While Tank was lookin' at his fingers with his good eye, the free one rambled around, an' half the time it rested on Horace, an' fair gave him the creeps; but when I could n't stay awake myself, I gave Tank the sign, an' he got delirious.

"I can't sleep," he wailed, "I can't sleep! My nerves, oh, my nerves! One minute they 're like hot wires, an' the next they 're like streaks of ice. You 'll have to tie me up, boys, you certainly will have to tie me up."

I argued again' it as bein' inhuman; but Tank begged so that finally I gave in, an' we tied him to a down pine tree. Horace helped to tie him, an' he sure did his best to make a good job of it. I was a little doubtful, myself, about Tank gettin' loose; but he had blowed up his muscles, an' he coughed me the all-right signal, so me an' Horace turned in.

Horace groaned consid'able while stretchin' out; but he began to snore before I had got through findin' the soft place. When I first go to bed, I like to roll about a bit, an' stretch, an' loosen up my muscles — I like to stay awake long enough to feel the tired spots sink down again' the earth, an' sort o' ooze into it; and before I had drifted off, Horace was buzzin' away at a log in great shape.

I must 'a' slept an hour when I was wakened by a bright light, an' lookin' out, I saw Tank Williams standin' with his back to the fire an' glowerin' down at Horace. "As soon

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as this log burns off, I 'm goin' to get you," sez Tank between set teeth.

"What are you goin' to get me for?" asked Horace. "You asked me to tie you to it. I did n't want to tie you to it, but you insisted. I 'll untie you if you want me to, and rub your brow again."

"It 's too late," muttered Tank. "It 's too infernal late. Nothin' could put me to sleep now. As soon as this log burns off, I 'm goin' to get you. You was the one which brought back my nerve trouble, an' you are the one what has to suffer."

Tank had n't been able to free himself from the pine tree; so he had dragged it in an' across the fire. It was n't such a big one as trees go; but it was a mighty big one for a man, tied to it as he was, to tote along. Horace reasoned with him a while longer, an' then when he saw that the trunk was about burned through, he got purty well off to one side, an' threw a chunk at me. I popped out of bed on the instant, an' began to shoot about promiscuous; so as to live up to my reputation.

When I 'd emptied my gun, I looked at Tank, as though seein' him for the first time, an' sez: "What in thunder da you mean, by raisin' all this havoc?"

"My nerves," sez Tank, "my pore nerves. I can't sleep, an' I can't keep my senses if I 'm left tied to this tree any longer. It 's all his fault, an' as soon as this log burns up, I 'm goin' ta hunt him down."

Tank an' I argued fierce as long as we could think of anything to say; an' just as the dead pine was gettin' too hot for Tank to stand it any longer, Horace calls in from the darkness, "Don't you want me to rub your brow a while an' see if that won't put you to sleep?"

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"Come in here," I sez, cross. "This man is liable to kill himself, an' you know more about nerves 'n I do."

Horace crawled out from behind a big rock, came in, shiverin' with the cold; an' we untied Tank from the log. He had managed to get his feet loose; but his hands had been tied behind him an' when they got cold, he could n't make a go of it. "Well," sez I, as soon as Tank was free, "what are you goin' to do now?"

"I move we get up the hosses, an' start at once," sez Tank. "I don't trust myself any longer, an' we can ride faster at night. My one hope, is to get to an Injun doctor, or else get so tired out that I can fall into a dreamless sleep."

"Why don't you ride alone?" demanded Horace with a sudden burst of intelligence. "Why don't you ride alone; an' then you could ride as fast as you wanted to, an' if you found the Injuns out o' humor, you could come back an' let us know."

This set us back for a minute: we had been playin' Horace for bein' utterly thought-loose; but he had figured out the best plan the' was, an' his eyes were bright an' eager.

"Take the hoss that 's fastened on the rope here," Horace went on; "an' we can take the manacled hosses in the mornin' and foller ya. Yes, that 's the best plan."

You see the fact was, we were only twenty or twenty-five miles from the ranch house. We had been circlin' an' zig-zaggin' through the hills, an' at night we hung up Horace's pony on a picket an' put hobbles on the balance. Bein' fooled on direction was n't any sign of Horace bein' a complete lunkhead; I 've known a heap o' wise ones get balled up in the mountains.

Tank stood puzzlin' over it with his free eye trottin' about

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in a circle; but he could n't think any way out of it. "All right," sez he, "if you two can get along without me, why, I 'll risk my life by bein' a scout."

"Nonsense," sez Horace; "the Injuns have n't riz for years, an' they 're not likely to again."

Tank only winked his lookin' eye, an' proceeded to fling the saddle on the picketed hoss. Horace was smilin' purty contented with himself, until I sez: "Which hoss are you goin' to ride to-morrow, Mr. Bradford?"

Then his face went blank as he recalled the blow-up we 'd had that mornin' gettin' the pack ponies contented with their loads. "By Jove, I can't ride any of them!" he exclaims. "It would kill me to have a hoss buck with me. I 'm so sore now I can hardly move."

"You don't look as nervous as you did, though," I sez to him for comfort.

He did n't pay me no heed. "Here, Williams," he calls, "you can't take that hoss. He 's the only one I can ride, and you 'll have to catch another."

"You ort have thought o' that before," sez Tank, goin' on with his arrangements, but movin' slow.

"Well, you two straighten it out among yourselves," sez I. "I 'm goin' back to bed. No wonder you 're nervous. It would make a saw-horse nervous to jibe around the way you two do."

I went off grumblin', an' I went to sleep before they settled it; but Tank stretched it out as much as he could, an' Horace did n't oversleep any that night. Next mornin' when I looked out, I saw him tied up with his back again' a tree, an' Tank's head in his lap. He was swathed in his slicker an' saddle-blanket to keep warm, an' was sound asleep. He looked purty well hammered out, but hanged if

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he did n't look a lot more worth while 'n he did when he started to take my treatment.

It seemed a shame to do it, as it was just gettin' into the gray; but I woke him up, an' asked him in a whisper what he was doin'. He sat an' blinked at me for a full minute before he remembered what or where he was, an' then he told me that he finally induced Tank to try havin' his head rubbed again, by lettin' Tank truss him up so he could n't keel over on him. "Gee, but I 'm cold an' stiff," he sez in a husky, raspin' voice. "I don't see how it can be so hot daytimes, an' so cold nights."

"This 'll do you a world of good, Mr. Bradford," sez I. "You see, you swell up with the heat daytimes, an' crimp down with the cold nights; an' this will goad on your circulation, fry the lard out o' ya, an' give your nerves a chance to get toned up." I quoted from the patent medicine almanac occasional, just so he would n't forget he was takin' treatment.

"I can't possibly ride, to-day," he sez, shakin' his head. "Honest, I 'm in agony."

"That 's just 'cause you 're stiff," sez I, kindly. "That 'll all wear off when the sun softens up your joint-oil. Why, man, you 'll look back on this trip as one o' the brightest spots in your whole life."

"I got hit in the back o' the head with a golf ball once," he flares back real angry; "an' that showed me a lot o' brightness, too. I don't want no more brightness, an' I don't intend to ride to-day."

I was especial pleased at the human traits he was displayin'. He had n't acted so healthy an' natural since he 'd been with us, an' I was encouraged to keep on with the treatment. "You will have to ride with us, even if we have to

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tie you on," I sez. "We are now close to the Injun country, an' we 're responsible for you. O' course the' ain't any danger from regular war parties; but Injun boys is just as full o' devilment as white boys, an' they have n't as many safety valves. They 're all the time sneakin' off an' playin' at war, an' they play a purty stiff game, too, believe me. If a dozen o' these young bucks, eighteen or twenty years old, was to stalk us, they 'd try most earnest to lift our hair."

"I 'd as soon be killed one way as another," he sez. "I can't stand it to ride, an' that 's all the' is to it."

Here was a queer thing: the little cuss actually was n't afeared of Injuns, which I had counted on as my big card. Nerves or no nerves, Horace Walpole Bradford was n't no coward; 'cause we are all afeared o' crazy folks, an' he thought Tank was crazy. If Tank had had two good eyes, chances are he would n't 'a' feared him; so I kicked Tank in the side an' woke him up.

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CHAPTER TEN

INJUNS!

WELL, we sure had a hard time gettin' Horace in the saddle that day. He was some like a burro, small but strong minded. Finally he agreed to try it if we would put the saddle-blanket on top the saddle instead of underneath.

"The hoss don't need it as bad as I do," sez he; "'cause he 's covered all over with hoss-hide an' has hair for paddin' besides; and furthermore, the saddle is lined with sheepskin underneath, while it 's as hard as iron on top; and I 'm just like a boil wherever I touch it."

We told him that a hard saddle was lots the easiest as soon as a feller got used to it; but he broke in an' said he did n't expect to live that long, an' that we could take our choice of leavin' him, or puttin' the saddle-blanket on top. The's lots of folks with the notion that a soft saddle or a soft chair or a soft bed is the easiest; an' it ain't much use to argue with 'em, though the truth is, that if a feller lived on goslin' down, he 'd get stuck with a pinfeather some day an' die o' loss of blood; while if he lived on jagged stones, he 'd finally wear into 'em until he had a smooth, perfect fittin' mold for his body. Still, the truth is only the truth to them 'at can see it; so we put the blanket on top, an' perched Horace astride it.

He stood it two hours, an' then said it was stretchin' his legs so 'at he was afeared a sudden jerk would split him to the chin; an' then we put the saddle on right, an' he found

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it full as easy as it had been the day before. The best way, an' the easiest an' the quickest, to toughen up, is just to toughen up. The human body can stand almost anything in the way o' hardship. After it has sent up word, hour after hour, that it is bein' hurt, an' no attention gets paid to it, why, it sets to work to remedy things on its own hook. In order to ride comfortable, a lot of muscles have to loosen an' stretch. Most o' the pain in ridin' comes from ridin' with set muscles. A feller can't balance easy with set muscles, it 's just one strainin' jerk after another, an' the trick o' ridin' is to move with the horse. Just as soon as ya get to goin' right along with the hoss, loose an' rubbery, you take the strain off o' both you an' him; but while you 're bumpin' again' him, it 's painful for both.

We rode about forty miles that day; and at the end of it Horace was n't complainin' any worse 'n at the start. Well, he could n't, as far as that goes; but his body had already begun to find the motion o' the hoss. Of course he had n't learned to balance, an' he still rode rigid; but we had give him an easy-gaited old hammock, an' when we drew up to make camp, he sat on his hoss without holdin' to the horn, an' said he was beginnin' to like it. When Tank lifted him down, though, his legs wobbled under him like rubber an' he squashed down in a heap, groanin'. We let him sleep where he lit while we were gettin' supper; 'cause we was sure he would need it before mornin'. He was n't nervous any longer; all he wanted was food, sleep, an' a lung full o' tobacco smoke. I felt rather proud o' my treatment.

Tank had to boot him about purty freely to waken him up enough to take his vittles; but he took a good lot of 'em, an' I was glad of it, 'cause this was the night the Injuns were goin' to attack us, an' he was n't scheduled to have any

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more solid nourishment until we got back to the ranch house. After supper he went to his pipe like a young duck to a puddle o' water. He had n't learned to handle his moisture while smokin' a pipe, an' when the pipe began to gargle, he muttered a little cuss-word under his breath. H. Walpole Bradford was comin' out wonderful.

The stiffenin' had all blew out o' the rim of his hat, givin' the sun full swing at him, an' his nose looked like a weakly tomato flung in a bed o' geraniums. He had wrinkled up his face around where his glasses fit, an' now with the sun gone down his skin had loosened up again, showin' the unburned wrinkles like painted marks. He sure did look tough! He was wearin' a gray suit with a belt around the middle an' canvas leggins.

Along about nine o'clock he nodded over into the fire, right at the most excitin' part of an Injun tale which Tank was makin' up for his especial benefit. We fished him out an' shook him awake; but he came to as cross as a hornet, an' swore he was goin' to sleep right where he was with all his clothes on.

"You 're a wise pigeon to sleep with your clothes on, to-night," sez Tank; "'cause this is the Injun country, an' ya can't tell what 'll happen; but the best plan for us to do is to divide up an' keep watch durin' the night."

"Keep watch!" yells Horace, glarin' at Tank. "I would n't keep watch to-night if I was bound to a torture stake. You can keep watch if you want to — an' it would n't discommode you no more 'n if you was an owl. Your dog-gone, doubly condemned nerves won't let you nor any one else sleep — but I 'm goin' to get some rest if I die for it."

"You 're a nice one, you are!" sez Tank. "This here expedition was got up just on account o' your nerves, an'

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now that we 've come to the most important point of all, why, you flam out an' put all the risk on us."

"You make me tired," sez Horace, scowlin' at Tank as fierce as a cornered mouse. "If you 're so everlastin' feared o' the Injuns — what ya got this bloomin' fire for?"

"We don't intend to sleep near the fire, Mr. Bradford," sez I, soothin'. "We intend to roll up our beds like as if we was in 'em an' then sneak off into the bushes an' sleep. We don't want any trouble if we can avoid it. If you 'll notice, you 'll see we have n't turned the hosses out to-night."

"These here Injuns is livin' on a reservation," sez he, "an' I don't believe 'at they 'd dare outrage us."

I was indignant with the little cuss for not bein' afeared of Injuns. My theory was, 'at nerves was a lot like hosses: keep a hoss shut up an' he 'll get bad an' kick an' raise Cain; but take him out an' ride his hide loose, an' he 'll simmer down consid'able. I wanted to give Horace's nerves such a complete stringin' out that they would n't worry him any more for a year; an' here he was, not carin' a hang for Injuns. "Beliefs is all right to the believers," sez I, stiffenin' up; "but facts is facts whether you believe in 'em or not. Every Injun outrage since the Civil War was planned on a reservation, an' we can't take no chances."

While he was studyin' over this with a pouty look on his face, Tank sez: "It 's time we fixed up an' moved out into the dark"; so we put rolls o' brush in the beds, an' went on up the side o' the rise where the' was a level spot I knew of, Horace stumblin' an' grumblin' every step o' the way. We were about two hundred yards from the fire an' it looked cozy an' cheerful, dancin' away beside the tarps. I was half a mind to join in with Horace, an' go on back; but our plans were all laid, an' besides, I had a little bet up with

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Spider Kelley, that I 'd return Horace in such fine condition that he 'd be willin' to drink blood or milk a cow calf-fashion.

"You go to sleep first," sez Tank to Horace; "I 'll watch till I get sleepy an' then I 'll call Happy, he 'll watch two hours, an' if it ain't dawn by that time, he 'll call you. I may not get sleepy at all, but you know how nerves is. I stayed awake ninety-six hours once, an' could n't get a speck sleepy. Then I decided to stay out the even hundred an' see how far I could jump after stayin' awake a hundred hours. I went to sleep in ten minutes an' did n't wake up for two days — so I 'm liable to be took sleepy to-night."

We had brought the slickers up, an' Horace rolled up in one, under a low evergreen, and began to snore in half a minute. As soon as he had got to wrastlin' with his breath in earnest, I went to the head o' the trail an' whistled for Spider Kelley. He an' four others were there, an' I told 'em it was all right to start in an hour, an' then I came back to Horace chucklin'. Spider enjoyed anything like this, an' he had fixed up the boys with feathers an' fringe an' smears o' chalk an' raspberry jam, till they looked as evil-minded as airy Injuns I 'd ever seen.

We set Horace's watch ahead five hours. Tank curled up an' went to sleep, an' then I started to wake Horace up. It took so long to get him to consciousness that I feared the hour would be up; but he finally got so he remembered what he was, an' then I told him not to make any fuss if he saw any Injuns, but to just wake us up. I tried to get him to take one o' my guns, but I did n't wear triggers on 'em an' he did n't savvy snap-shootin', so he took a club in his hand an' started to parade.

He looked at his watch while I was stretchin' out in his warm spot, an' he looked at it again before I was through

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loosenin' up my muscles. It beats the world how slow time crawls to a man on watch. I was sleepy myself, but I 'd have bit out my tongue before I 'd have give in. I lay half on my right side with my hat drawn down, watchin' Horace. After about ten minutes, he pulled out his watch again an' looked at it. He pulled out the snap to set it ahead, in order to fool us, but he was troubled with too much morality, so he snapped it shut an' spoke to himself between his set teeth for several moments.

I reckon he must have kept on his feet for twenty minutes, an' then he settled down with his face to the fire, which I had fed up on my way back from seein' Spider, an' said loud enough for me to hear: "This is all damn foolishness."

He said it so slow an' solemn an' earnest, that I purt nigh choked; but I kept still, he kept still, an' the fire kept dancin' before him. His breathin' grew deep an' steady, his nerves was all coiled up comfortable; and tired muscles don't make a feller wakeful. Purty soon Horace began to gargle his palate, an' then I was ready for Spider Kelley.

The plan was for him to come up close so as to entertain Horace while his braves sneaked on to the dummies in the tarps; but the' was no occasion for sneakin'. Horace had turned over the camp to fate, an' he was n't worryin' his head about what was goin' to happen to it.

Finally, Spider got disgusted an' he went down an' joined the others, an' they sure raised a riot; but all the time, Horace slumbered on. Spider caught up our hosses, put our saddles an' packs on 'em, threw some pieces of old canvas he brought along on the fire; and he an' the rest raised a wild warwhoop and galloped away; but Horace was too busy to pay any attention. Spider an' the boys had to work next day, an' they was some put out not to have a

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little more fun for their trouble. It was all Spider could do to keep 'em from sneakin' back an' kidnappin' Horace, but this was liable to give the whole thing away, so he talked 'em out of it. As soon as the noise had died down, I set Horace's watch back five hours, an' then I went to sleep myself. It was purty chilly, and I was n't quite sure who the joke was on.

When Tank woke up, he started in on Horace; but his noise wakened me up first. When Horace saw what had happened to the camp, he was about wordless; but after we had called him down about it for five or ten minutes, he flared up an' talked back as harsh as we did. He said 'at he had kept guard for over three hours, fightin' off sleep by walkin' back an' forth; and had n't sat down until it had started to lighten in the sky. He stuck to this tale, and I 'm sure he believed it himself. He 'd been so sleepy the night before that he could n't have told a dream from an actual happenin', so when he began to get excited, we dropped it.

"All right," sez Tank at last; "you 've put us into a nice fix, but the' ain't no use tryin' to pickle yesterday. What we 've got to do is to hoof it back, an' we might as well begin. We 're in a nice fix: nothin' to eat, not a single cabin on the road back, an' for all we know the's a pack of Injuns watchin' us this blessid moment."

"How do ya know it was Injuns?" sez Horace.

"Look there, an' there, an' there," sez Tank, pointin' at moccasin prints an' feathers. "Then besides, no white men would 'a' burned up the tarps."

"Do you mean to say 'at we got to walk all the way back?" sez Horace.

"All the way, an' without no grub," sez Tank.

Horace sat down on the end of a charred log. "Well,

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I 'll die right here," sez he. " This spot suits me as well as any other."

" You don't have to die at all," sez I. " A body can go forty days without food, an' it does more good than harm." Friar Tuck had told me a lot about fastin', an' I was keen to try it out on Horace. From all I could see from the theory o' fastin', it was just what was needed for Horace's nerves.

" Look at me," sez Horace, pullin' at the waist of his clothes. " I bet I 've lost twenty pounds already, on this fool trip. Twenty pounds more would make me a corpse, an' I 'd just as soon be made one here as anywhere. As soon as I rest up a little, I 'm goin' to begin to yell until I draw those blame Injuns back, an' have 'em finish the job in short order."

He was n't bluffin', he was simply desp'rit. " You 'll have to walk with us," sez I; " come on."

Tank took one arm, an' I took the other, an' we started forth. For the first hour he hung back, and then he began to step out on his own hook. When we rested at noon, he was the freshest one of us. Tank an' I had ridin' boots, an' ridin' muscles; while he had walkin' shoes, an' no muscles at all worth mentionin'. " I can play at this game as well as any one," sez Horace, chewin' a blade o' grass, an' lookin' proud of himself.

Tank was purty well fussed up; he was n't workin' out any theories, he had just come along to help pester Horace an' have a little amusement; but it began to appear to him that his fun was comin' high-priced.

By nightfall we was all tol'able hungry; but Horace was so set up over bein' able to put over a full day's walk on nothin' to eat that he was purty speechy, an' it was nine

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o'clock before he went to sleep. As soon as he had dropped off, I went down to meet Spider Kelley an' get the grub he had brought out for me 'n' Tank. He said 'at the other boys was n't braggin' none about their trip the night before; but they were all ready to roast me an' Tank as soon as we got in. We 'd had it fixed that Spider an' the rest was to take turns worryin' Horace on the back trip; but Spider said that it looked to him as if I 'd win the bet anyway, so he intended to play neutral from that on. As soon as me an' Tank had eaten, we turned in, an' all of us slept like logs.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

BENEFITS OF FASTING

THE next day Horace walked easier 'n any of us. Now I 'm tellin' this to ya straight 'n' you can believe it or not just as ya please; but that little cuss stepped right along, began to notice the scenery, an' even cracked a few jokes now an' again; while me an' Tank just plodded with our minds fixed on the meal we were goin' to get that night. Horace had give up all thought o' meals, so they did n't pester him any.

At the end of the third day Horace had lost his appetite complete. Friar Tuck had swore that hunger did n't worry a man more 'n three days, an' sure enough, it did n't. Horace did n't care whether he ever et again or not. He 'd get a little dizzy when he 'd start out, an' once in a while he 'd feel a bit fainty; but as far as bein' ravenous went, me an Tank had him beat a mile.

"Where is the joke o' this fool trip?" growled Tank to me on the evenin' of the fourth day as we were eatin' the supper Spider Kelley had brought out. "He ain't a human at all, Horace ain't; he 's a rep-tile, an' can live without food."

Spider was tickled a lot, and said he did n't care if he did lose his bet, that it was worth it to find how everlastin' tough a little half-hand like Horace could be when drove to it. I 'd been thinkin' it over all day, but I did n't say anything.

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Friar Tuck had said it was a question of will power, more 'n anything else: that if a man just held his thoughts away from food it would n't bother him; but if he kept thinkin' of it, the digestin' juices would flow into his stomach an' make him think he was starvin'; so I was minded to try a new plan next day.

"Spider," I sez, "you put a cow an' calf up in Nufty's Corral" — which was the name of a little shut-in park we would go through the next afternoon. "Put 'em there in the mornin', a cow with an off brand, if you can find one, an' trim their hoofs down close, so they won't go back to the bunch. Remember 'at we 're on foot, an' trim 'em close enough to make it hurt 'em to walk. I 'm goin' to make Horace hungry if I can."

"I hate to play again' him and my own bet," sez Spider; "but I 'll have the cow there, just to see what you 're up to. If you 're goin' to butcher it, though, I don't see why a young steer would n't be better."

"I 'll count on you havin' it there," sez I; an' then Spider rode back to the ranch house, an' me an' Tank went to sleep.

Next mornin' me an' Tank put the catridges out of our belts into our pockets. As soon as we started to walk I began to talk about my hunger, an' weakness, an' the empty feelin' in my head an' stomach. At first Horace did n't pay any heed; but from the start, ol' Tank Williams caught every symptom I suggested; until I feared he 'd curl up on the trail an' die o' starvation. Finally, though, Horace began to pay heed to my suggestions, an' to sigh an' moan a little. What finally got him was my gnawin' at my rope an' gauntlet. Tank an' I had saved our ropes, 'cause we expected to have need of 'em; and when noon came an'

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I sat with a stupid look in my face, chewin' first the rope, an' then the wrist o' the gauntlet, Horace began to have some of the symptoms I was fishin' for. Finally he borrowed one o' my gauntlets, an' after he had munched on it a while, he was as hungry as any one could wish.

"I can't go another peg," he sez when I got up to start on again.

"How does that come?" I asked him. "When we stopped to rest you was feelin' more chipper 'n any of us."

"I 'm dyin' o' hunger," he replied, solemn. "I 've got a gnawin' pain in my stomach, an' I 'm all in. I fear my stomach is punctured or stuck together or somethin'."

I had had a lot o' discussions with Friar Tuck about the power o' suggestion; but I had never took much stock in it. I could see now, though, that it actually did work. As long as Horace was tellin' himself that everything was all right, why, it was all right. Then when I suggested 'at we were dyin' of hunger, why, he actually began to die of hunger; an' it was wonderful to see the change in him. He showed us how he had ganted down; and the fact was, his bones had become purty prominent without any help from suggestin'. He did n't have any more belly 'n a snake; but his eyes were bright, an' his skin clear, except that it was peelin' off purty splotchy, from sun-burn.

We finally left him an' started on; and after we 'd got some distance, he staggered after us; but he was just goin' on his nerve now, an' not gettin' much joy out of existence.

About four in the afternoon, we reached Nufty's Corral, a fine little park with only a narrow entrance at each end. Horace was up with us by this time, an' we were all ploddin' along head down. Suddenly Horace grabbed us by the arms. "Hush!" he sez.

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"What 's up?" sez I, lookin' at him.

"Look," he whispers, pointin' at the cow an' calf; "there 's food."

We drew back an' consulted about it. "The great danger after a fast," I sez in warnin', "lies in overeatin'. All we can do is to drink a little blood for the first few hours."

"Why can't we broil a steak over some coals?" sez Horace.

"It would kill us to eat steak now," sez I.

He held out for the steak; but I finally sez that if he won't promise to be temperate an' eat only what I tell him, I 'll drive off the cow; and then he comes around, and agrees to it.

"You sneak around to the far openin', Tank," I sez, then I pauses, an' looks at him as though shocked. "Where 's your catridges, man?" I asked.

Tank felt of his belt, and seemed plumb beat out, then he looked at mine, an' yelled, "Where 's yours?"

We both sat down on stones an' went over what we had done every minute o' the time since we had started out; until Horace became frantic, an' sez: "What 's the difference what became of 'em? Your revolvers are loaded. You can sure kill one cow out o' twenty-four shots."

"Twenty shots," I corrected. "We allus carry the hammer on an empty chamber; an' I 'm so bloomin' weak I doubt if I could hit a cow in ten shots."

Horace turned loose an' told us what he thought of us, an' it was edifyin' to hearken to him — he hit the nail on the head so often. Finally I sez: "Well, a man can do no more than try — Go ahead, Tank, but don't let her get by you, whatever happens."

The cow, which was a homely grade-whiteface with

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a splotch on her nose which made it look as if most of the nose had been cut off, stood in the center of the park, an' she was beginnin' to get uneasy, although the wind was from her way.

As soon as Tank got to his entrance he shot in the air; an' she came chargin' down on me. I shot over her, an' she charged back. We kept this up until Horace lost patience an' called me a confounded dub. "Here," sez I, "the's two catridges left. You fire 'em, I won't."

At first he refused, but he was desperate, and finally after I 'd told him to use both hands, he took a shot. The cow was standin' closest to us, but lookin' Tank's way, an' Horace nicked her in the ham. Instead of chargin' Tank, like a sensible cow, she came for us head on. Now, when a bull charges, he picks out somethin' to steer for, then closes his eyes, and sets sail; but a cow keeps her eyes open, an' she don't aim to waste any plunges either. Horace stood out in the center of the entrance an' banged away again, strikin' the ground about ten feet in front of him.

"Run!" I yells to him, jumpin' back behind a big rock, "Run!"

He forgot all about bein' hungry, an' he started to back-trail like a scared jack-rabbit. The cow had forgot all about havin' had her hoofs pared, an' she took after him like a hungry coyote. As she passed me, I roped her, took a snub around the rock, an' flopped her; but she did just what I thought she 'd do — rolled to her feet an' took after me. She was angry. I 'd have given right smart for a tough little pony between my knees.

The rock was too big to get a half hitch over, so I just ran at right angles from her, hopin' to stretch out more rope 'n she could cover. I did it by a few feet; but she

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The cow had forgot all about havin' had her hoofs pared, an' she took after him like a hungry coyote

See page 106

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swung around into my rope head on, an' this flung me up again' her side. I managed to hang on to the rope, however, an' this fixed her, 'cause she 'd have had to pull that rock over before she could 'a' come any farther. Horace had stopped an' was gappin' at us from a safe distance; but Tank arrived by this time an' put another rope on her an' we had her cross-tied between two big rocks by the time Horace arrived.

"What ya goin' to kill her with?" he asked, his eyes dancin' like an Injun's at the beef whack-up.

"My catridges are all gone," sez Tank.

"Mine too," sez I.

"Can't you use a knife, or a stone?" sez Horace, the dude.

"You can try it if you want to," sez I; "but hanged if I will."

He took a big stone an' walked to the head of the cow, but his nerve gave out, an' he threw down the stone. "What in thunder did you tie her up for, then?" sez he.

"I beg your pardon," sez I, "but I thought perhaps she might be a little vexed with you on account o' your shootin' her up. She was headed your way."

He sat down on a stone an' looked at the cow resentful. Suddenly his face lit up. "Why don't you milk her?" sez he. "We can live on milk for weeks."

It 's funny how much alike hungry animals look. As Horace sat on the stone with his anxious face, his poppin' eyes, his mussed up side-burns, an' the water drippin' from his mouth at thought o' the milk, he looked so much like a setter pup I once knew that it was all I could do to hold a straight face.

"Do you know how to milk, Tank?" I sez.

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"I don't," sez Tank; "nor I don't know what it tastes like."

"Go ahead an' milk her, Mr. Bradford," I sez. "You 're the only one what knows how to milk, or who cares to drink it. What you goin' to milk it in?"

"I never milked in my life," sez he; "but I saw it done once when I was a boy, an' I 'm goin' to try to milk in my hat."

He had a bad time of it; but he only got kicked twice, an' both times it was short, glancin' blows, not much more 'n shoves. Finally, he came over to where me an' Tank was settin' an' flopped himself down beside us. "Can't you strangle her with those ropes?" he sez, in what might well be called deadly earnest.

We shook our heads, an' continued to sit there lookin' at the cow as though we expected she 'd point the way out of our trouble. Presently the calf remembered his own appetite, an' rushed up an' gave a demonstration of what neat an' orderly milkin' was. Horace sighed. "Gee, I bet that 's good," he said, the water drippin' from his lips again. He had been four days without food, walkin' all that time through the mountains, sleepin' out doors with no cover but a slicker; and he had about burned up all his waist products, which Friar Tuck said was a city man's greatest handicap. His eyes got a little red as he watched the calf, an' I saw that he meant to slaughter it; so I sez to him: "That 's the way to milk, Mr. Bradford. Why don't you sneak up on the other side an' try it that way, the same time the calf is?"

He studied a moment, an' then shook his head. "No, she could tell me from the calf," he said sorrowful. "Our foreheads are shaped different, an' I 'd have to get down on my

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hands and knees. She 'd tell me in a minute, an' I don't want to be on my hands an' knees when she kicks me."

"We could throw an' hog-tie her," sez Tank; "and you could get it easy an' comfortable. Would you want us to do that, Mr. Bradford?"

Horace jumped to his feet an' shook his fist in Tank's face. "Don't call me Mister again," he yelled. "I 'm plumb sick of it. If I ever live to get another bath an' back East where the's food in plenty, why, I 'll take up the Mister again; but now that I 've got to a point where I have to suck milk from a hog-tied cow, you call me Horace, or even Dinky — which was my nickname at school. Yes, for heaven's sake, tie the cow. I have to have milk, an' that 's the only way I see to get it."

Well, Tank an' I was so full o' laugh we could hardly truss up the cow; but we finally got her on her back so 'at she could n't do nothin' but snap her tail, an' then Horace threw his hat on the ground, an' started in. I was entirely joyful: I knew 'at Spider Kelley, an' as many o' the boys as could sneak away, were watchin' us from up on the hill, an' this was the grand triumph of my treatment for nerves.

Horace approached the cow with consid'able caution, as she was in an awkward position. The calf had been interrupted in his meal, before he had squenched his thirst, an' he was still prospectin' about on his own hook.

"Here," said Horace, givin' him a push, "this is my turn."

You know how a calf is: a calf ain't afeared o' nothin' except hunger. Here was his food-supply bein' robbed, right when he was needin' it. He blatted down in his throat, an' tried to nose Horace out of the way. Horace was findin' that milk the best stuff he had ever tasted, an' he fought off

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the calf with his right hand, while he steadied himself by puttin' his left on the hind leg o' the calf's mother, an' got a nice coat o' creamy froth in his side-burns. He was so blame hungry he did n't see a speck o' humor in it; but me an' Tank nearly died.

"Say," sez Horace, raisin' his head, the milk drippin' from his lips, "can't one o' you fellers fend off this calf till I finish."

Tank held the calf while I advised Horace to be temperate, an' after a bit he gave a sigh an' said, that that was all he could hold just then, but not to let the cow escape. We loosened her, left one o' the ropes on for a drag picket, an' took off the other. She was purty well subdued; but we refused to give Horace any more milk that night, an' he went to sleep before we had a fire built. Spider Kelley was wabblin' with laughter when he brought us our supper. He had been the only one who could stay after bringin' up the cow; but he said he would n't 'a' missed it for three jobs.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

A COMPLETE CURE

NEXT mornin' we fed Horace all the milk he could hold, an' tried to drive the cow along with us; but her hoofs had been pared so thin that it made her cross an' we had to give that projec' up.

"How far are we from the ranch house?" asked Horace.

"About sixty miles," sez Tank.

"That 's what I thought," sez he. "Now, I can't see any sense in all of us hoofin' that distance. I 'd go if I knew the way; but one of you could go, an' the other stay with me an' the cow. Then the one which went could bring back food on the buckboard, and it would be as good as if we all went."

Now this was a fine scheme; but neither Tank nor I had thought of it. We had intended to follow our own windin' circle back every step o' the way; but when the milk set Horace's brain to pumpin', he fetched up this idee which saved us all a lot o' bother.

"I shall go myself," sez Tank; "weak as I am, I 'll go myself."

It was only about fifteen or twenty miles by the short cut, an' this would get him back to regular meals in short order; so he left me his rope an' set out. Horace helped me with the cow that night, an' he proved purty able help. He was feelin' fine, an' the milk had filled him out wonderful. He said he had n't felt so rough 'n' ready for twenty years; but

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Spider Kelley failed to arrive with my meal that night, and I went to bed feelin' purty well disgusted. Tank had met him before noon that day, an' he had gone in for a hoss; and they had decided that it would be a good stunt to give me some o' my own treatment.

Next mornin' I felt as empty as a balloon; so after Horace had enjoyed himself, I took a little o' the same, myself; but I did n't take it like he did. I held my mouth open an' squirted it in, an' it was mighty refreshin'.

"Huh," sez Horace, "you 're mightily stuck up. The calf's way is good enough for me."

"I got a split lip," I sez, half ashamed o' myself.

They left us there three days to allow for the time it would have taken Tank to walk if it had been as far as we claimed it was; and then Tillte Dutch drove out the buckboard. He said 'at Spider an' Tank had quit and gone into Boggs for a little recreation; but after I had eaten my first meal out o' the grub he brought, I did n't bear 'em any ill will. The joke was on me as much as it was on Horace; but I 'd 'a' gone through twice as much to test that theory, an' I 'd had the full worth o' my bother. Horace was a new man: he was full o' vim an' snap, an' he gave me credit for it an' became mighty friendly an' confidential.

He stood up in the buckboard an' made a farewell speech to the cow which lasted ten minutes. He also apologized to the calf, an' told him that when he got back East, he would raise his hat every time he passed a milk wagon. He sure felt in high spirits, and made up a ramblin' sort of a song which lasted all the way back to the house. It had the handiest tune ever invented and he got a lot o' fun out of it. It began:

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"Oh we walked a thousand miles without eatin' any food,
An' then we met a cow an' calf, an' gee, but they looked good!
Her eyes like ancient Juno's were so in-o-cent an' mild,
We could n't bear to take her life, we only robbed her child.
She strove to save the lactual juice to feed her darling boy;
So we had to fling her on her back to fill our soûls with joy.
Now Tank an' Happy were too proud to compete with a calf,
So they sat them down an' dined on wind, while they weakly tried to laugh.
I 'm but a simple-minded cuss, not proud like one of these;
So I filled myself so full of milk, I 'm now a cottage cheese."

Horace was as proud o' this song as though it was the first one ever sung. He used the same tune on it that blind men on corners use. I reckon that tune fits most any sort of a song; it 's more like the "Wearin' of the Green" than anything else but ten times sadder an' more monotonous. He said he had once wrote a Greek song at college but it was n't a patch on this one, and had n't got him nothin' but a medal. I used to know twelve or eighteen verses, but I 've forgot most of it. It was a hard one to remember because the verses was n't of the same length. Sometimes a feller would have to stretch a word all out of shape to make it cover the wave o' the tune, an' sometimes you 'd have to huddle the words all up into a bunch. Horace said that all high class music was this way; but it made it lots more bother to learn than hymns.

The verse which pleased me the most was the forty-third. Horace himself said 'at this was about as good as any, though he liked the seventy-ninth one a shade better, himself. The forty-third one ran:

"A cow-boy does not live on milk, that 's all a boy-cow 'll drink;
But the cow-ma loves the last the most, which seems a funny think.
I do not care for milk in pans with yellow scum o'er-smeared.
I like to gather mine myself; and strain it through my beard."

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I never felt better over anything in my life than I did over returnin' Horace in this condition. It was some risk to experiment with such a treatment as mine on a feller who regarded himself as an invalid; but here he was, comin' back solid an' hearty, with his shape shrunk down to normal, an' full o' jokes an' song.

Tillte Dutch had been one o' the braves in Spider's Injun party; so when we got in, about ten in the evenin', he lured the rest o' the pack out to the corral, an' we agreed not to make the details of our trip public. The ol' man would n't have made a whole lot o' fuss seein' as it had turned out all right; but still, he was dead set on what he called courtesy to guests; and he might 'a' thought that we had played Horace a leetle mite strong. Barbie noticed the change in Horace and, o' course, she pumped most o' the story out o' me.

Horace himself was as game a little rooster as I ever saw. He follered me around like a dog after that, helpin' with my chores, an' ridin' every chance he had. He got confidential, an' told me a lot about himself. He said that he had n't never had any boyhood, that his mother was a rich widow, an' was ambitious to make a scholar out of him; that she had sent him to all kinds o' schools an' colleges an' universities, and had had private tutors for him, and had jammed his head so full o' learnin' that the' was n't room for his brain to beat; so it had just lain smotherin' amidst a reek of all kinds o' musty old facts. He said that he never had had time for exercise, and had never needed money; so he had just settled into a groove lined with books an' not leadin' anywhere at all. He said that since his mother's death he had been livin' like a regular reecluse, thinkin' dead thoughts in dead languages, an' not takin' much interest in anything

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which had happened since the fall o' Rome; but now that he had learned for the first time what a world of enjoyment the' was in just feelin' real life poundin' through his veins, he intended to plunge about in a way to increase the quality, quantity, and circulation of his blood.

Ya could n't help likin' a feller who took things the way he did — we all liked him. He told us to treat him just as if he was a fourteen-year-old boy, which we did, an' the' was n't nothin' in the way of a joke that he was n't up against before the summer was over; but he came back at us now an' again, good an' plenty.

Tank an' Spider tossin' up their jobs had left me with more work on my hands 'n I generally liked, so I had to stick purty close to the line until they went broke an' took on again. Then one day me an' Horace took a ride up into the hills. We had some lunch along and about noon we sat down in a grassy spot to eat it. We had just finished and had lighted our pipes for a little smoke when we heard Friar Tuck comin' up the trail. I had n't seen him for months, an' I was mighty glad to hear him again. He was fair shoutin', so I knew 'at things was right side up with him. He was singin' the one which begins: "Oh, come, all ye faithful, joyful an' triumphant," and he shook the echoes loose with it.

Horace turned to me with a surprised look on his face; "Who 's that?" he sez.

"That 's Friar Tuck," sez I, "an' if you 've got any troubles tell 'em to him."

"Well, would n't that beat ya!" exclaimed Horace, an' just then the Friar came onto our level with his hat off an' his head thrown back. He was leadin' a spare hoss, an' seemed at peace with all the world.

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When he spied me, he headed in our direction, an' as soon as he had finished the chorus, he called: "Hello, Happy! What are you hidin' from up here?"

I jumped to my feet, an' Horace got to his feet, too, an' bowed an' said: "How do ya do, Mr. Carmichael?"

A quick change came over the Friar's face. It got cold an' haughty; and I was flabbergasted, because I had never seen it get that way before. "How do you do," he said, as cheery an' chummy as a hail-storm.

But he did n't need to go to the trouble o' freezin' himself solid; Horace was just as thin skinned as he was when it was necessary, an' he slipped on a snuffer over his welcomin' smile full as gloomy as was the Friar's. I was disgusted: nothin' pesters me worse 'n to think a lot o' two people who can't bear each other. It leaves it so blame uncertain which one of us has poor taste.

Well, we had one o' those delightful conflabs about the weather an' "how hot it was daytimes, but so cool an' refreshin' nights," an', "I must be goin' now," an' "oh, what 's the use o' goin' so soon" — and so on. Then Horace an' the Friar bowed an' the Friar rode away as silent an' dignified as a dog which has been sent back home.

"Well," sez Horace, after we 'd seated ourselves again, "I never expected to see that man out here. I would n't 'a' been more surprised to have seen a blue fish with yaller goggles on, come swimmin' up the pass."

"Oh, would n't ya?" sez I. "Well, that man ain't no more like a blue fish with goggles on than you are. He 's ace high anywhere you put him, an' don't you forget that."

"You need n't arch up your back about it," he sez. "I

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have n't said anything again' him. I gave up goin' to church on his account."

"That 's nothin' to brag about," sez I. "A man 'll give up goin' to church simply because they hold it on Sunday, which is the one day o' the week when he feels most like stackin' up his feet on top o' somethin' an' smokin' a pipe. A man who could n't plan out an excuse for not goin' to church would n't be enough intelligent to know when he was hungry."

"You must 'a' set up late last night to whet your sarcasm!" sez Horace, swellin' up a little. "Why don't you run along and hold up a screen, so 'at folks can't look at your parson."

"How 'd you happen to quit church on his account?" sez I.

"He was only a curate, when I first knew him," sez Horace.

"He 's a curate yet," sez I. "I tried one of his cures myself, lately; an' it worked like a charm." I turned my head away so 'at Horace would n't guess 'at he was the cuss I had tried it on.

"A curate has n't nothin' to do with doctorin'," sez Horace. "A curate is only the assistant of the regular preacher which is called a rector. The curate does the hard work an' the rector gets the big pay."

"That 's the way with all assistants," sez I; "so don't bother with any more details. Why did you quit goin' to church?"

"I quit because he quit," sez Horace.

"What did he quit for," sez I; "just to bust up the church by drawin' your patronage away from it?"

"He quit on account of a girl," sez Horace; an' then I

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stopped my foolishness, an' settled down to get the story out of him. Here I 'd been wonderin' for years about Friar Tuck; an' all those weeks I had been with Horace I had never once thought o' tryin' to see what he might know.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AN UNEXPECTED CACHE

HUMANS is the most disappointin' of all the animals: when a mule opens his mouth, you know what sort of a noise is about to happen, an' can brace yourself accordin'; an' the same is true o' screech-owls, an' guinea-hens an' such; but no one can prepare for what is to come forth when a human opens his mouth. You meet up with a professor what knows all about the stars an' the waterlines in the hills an' the petrified fishes, an' such; but his method o' bein' friendly an' agreeable is to sing comic songs like a squeaky saw, an' dance jigs as graceful as a store box; while the fellow what can sing an' dance is forever tryin' to lecture about stuff he is densely ignorant of.

The other animals is willin' to do what they can do, an' they take pride in seein' how well they can do it; but not so a human. He only takes pride in tryin' to do the things he can't do. A hog don't try to fly, nor a butterfly don't try to play the cornet, nor a cow don't set an' fret because she can't climb trees like a squirrel; but not so with man: he has to try everything 'at anything else ever tried, an' he don't care what it costs nor who gets killed in the attempt. Sometimes you hear a wise guy say: "No, no that's contrary to human nature." This is so simple minded it allus makes me silent. Human nature is so blame contrary, itself, that nothin' else could possibly be contrary to it. To think of Horace knowin' about the Friar, an' yet doggin' me all over the map with that song of his, was enough to make

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me shake him; but I did n't. I wanted the story, so I pumped him for it, patient an' persistent.

"I never was very religious," began Horace. Most people begin stories about other people, by tellin' you a lot about themselves, so I had my resignation braced for this. "I allus liked the Greek religion better 'n airy other," he went on. "It was a fine, free, joyous religion, founded on Art an' music, an' symmetry — "

I was willin' to stand for his own biography; but after waitin' this long for a clue to the Friar's past, I was n't resigned to hearin' a joint debate on the different religions; so I interrupted, by askin' if him believin' in the Greek religion was what had made Friar Tuck throw up his job.

"No, you chump," — me an' Horace was such good friends by this time that we did n't have any regard for one another's feelin's. "No, you chump," he sez, "I told you he quit on account of a girl. I don't look like a girl, do I?"

"Well," sez I, studying him sober, "those side-burns look as if they might 'a' been bangs which had lost their holt in front an' slipped down to your lip; but aside from this you don't resemble a girl enough to drive a man out o' church."

I allus had better luck with Horace after I 'd spurred him up a bit.

"You see, Friar Tuck, as you call him, was a good deal of a fanatic, those days," sez Horace, after he 'd thrown a stone at me. "He took his religion serious, an' wanted to transform the world into what it would be if all people tried their best to live actual Christ-like lives. He was a big country boy, fresh from college, an' full of ideals, an' feelin' strong enough to hammer things out accordin' to the pattern he had chose.

"It was his voice which got him his place. He had a

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perfectly marvelous voice, an' I never heard any one else read the service like he did. This was what took me to church, and I 'd have gone as long as he stayed. You see, Happy, life is really made up of sensations an' emotions; and it used to lift me into the clouds to see his shinin' youth robed in white, an' hear that wonderful voice of his fillin' the great, soft-lighted church with melody an' mystery. It was all I asked of religion an' it filled me with peace an' inspiration. Of course, from a philosophical standpoint, the Greek religion — "

"Did the girl believe in the Greek religion?" I asked to switch him back.

"No, no," he snapped. "This Greek religion that I 'm speakin' of died out two thousand years ago."

"Then let 's let it rest in peace," sez I, "an' go on with your story."

"You understand that this was a fashionable church," sez Horace. "They was willin' to pay any sum for music an' fine readin' an' all that; but they was n't minded to carry out young Carmichael's plan in the matter of Christianizin' the world. They was respectable, an' they insisted that all who joined in with 'em must be respectable, too; while he discovered that a lot o' the most persistent sinners was n't respectable at all. His theory was, that religion was for the vulgar sinners, full as much as for the respectable ones; so he made a round-up an' wrangled in as choice a lot o' sinners as a body ever saw; but his bosses would n't stand for his corralin' 'em up in that fashionable church.

"He stood out for the sinners; an' finally they compromised by gettin' him a little chapel in the slums, an' lettin' him go as far as he liked with the tough sinners down there through the week; but readin' the service on Sundays to the

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respectable sinners in the big church. This plan worked smooth as ice, until they felt the need of a soprano singer who could scrape a little harder again' the ceilin' than the one they already had. Then Carmichael told 'em that he had discovered a girl with a phe-nominal voice, an' had been teachin' her music for some time. He brought her up an' gave her a trial — "

" An' she was the girl, huh? " I interrupted.

" She had a wonderful voice, all right," sez Horace, not heedin' me; " but she was n't as well trained as that church demanded; so they hired her for twenty-five dollars a Sunday on the condition that she take lessons from a professor who charged ten dollars an hour. She was game, though, an' took the job, an' made good with it, too, improvin' right along until it was discovered that she was singin' week-nights in a café, from six to eight in the evenin', an' from ten to twelve at night.

" The girl had been singin' with a screen o' flowers in front of her; and some o' the fashionable male sinners from the big church had been goin' there right along to hear her sing; but they could n't work any plan to get acquainted with her, and this made her a mystery, and drew 'em in crowds. Finally, as her voice got better with the trainin', critics admitted 'at she could make an agreeable noise; and the common sinners was tickled to have their judgment backed up, so they began to brag about it. The result o' this was, that one ol' weasel had to swaller his extra-work-at-the-office excuse, and take his own wife to hear the singer. Then the jig was up. The woman recognized the voice first pop; and within a week it was known that Carmichael had been goin' home with her every night.

" Now, you may be so simple-minded that you don't know

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it; but really, this was a perfectly scandalous state of affairs, and the whole congregation began to buzz like a swarm of angry bees. Carmichael was as handsome a young feller as was ever seen; but he had never taken kindly to afternoon teas and such-like functions, which is supposed to be part of a curate's duties; so now, when they found he had been goin' home nights with a girl 'at sang in a café it like to have started an epidemic of hysteria.

"They found that the girl lived in a poor part o' the town, and supported her mother who was sickly, that they were strangers to the city, and also not minded to furnish much in the way o' past history. They insisted upon her givin' up the café-singin' at once; and from what I 've heard, they turned up their noses when they said it.

"Carmichael pointed out that she was givin' up twenty a week for lessons which they had insisted upon; and asked 'em if they were sure a girl could be any more respectable, supportin' a sickly mother on five a week, than if she added fifteen to it by singin' in a café. He got right uppish about it and said right out that he could n't see where it was one bit more hellish for her to sing at the café than for other Christians to pay for a chance to listen to her.

"This tangled 'em up in their own ropes consid'able; but what finally settled it was, 'at their richest member up and died, and they simply had to have a sky-scrapin' soprano to start him off in good style; so they gave her twenty a week and paid for her lessons. The café people soon found what a card she 'd been and they offered her fifty a week; but she was game and stuck to the agreement."

"How did you find out all this, Horace?" I asked.

"A friend o' mine belonged to the vestry," sez Horace; "and he kept me posted to the minute. This was his first

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term at it, and it was his last; but he was a lucky cuss to get the chance just when he did. I have since won him over to see the beauty o' the Greek religion."

"What became o' the girl?" sez I with some impatience, for I did n't care as much as a single cuss-word for the Greek religion.

"Carmichael was a gentle spoken young feller," sez Horace, "but for all that, he was n't a doormat by inheritance nor choice, and he kept on payin' attention to the girl, and got her to sing at his annex in the slums. Night after night he filled the place with the best assortment o' last-chance sinners 'at that locality could furnish; and he an' the girl an' the sinners all pitched in and offered up song music to make the stars rock; but St. Holiernthou was n't the sort of a parish to sit back and let a slum outfit put over as swell a line o' melody as they were servin', themselves; so they ordered Carmichael to cut her off his list. He tried to get 'em to hire another curate, and let him have full swing at the annex; but they told him they 'd close it up first.

"Next, a delegation o' brave an' inspired women took it upon 'emselves to call on the girl. They pointed out that she was standin' in the way o' Carmichael's career, that, under good conditions, his advance was certain; but that a false step at the start would ruin it all. They went on and hinted that if it was n't for her, he might have married an heiress, and grow up to be one o' the leadin' ministers o' the whole country."

"What did she do, Horace?" sez I.

"The girl was proud; she thanked the delegation for takin' so much interest in her — and said that she would not detain 'em any longer; but would think it over as careful as she could. Then she walked out o' the room; and the delega-

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tion strutted off with their faces shinin' like a cavey o' prosperous cats. The girl vanished, just simply vanished. She wrote Carmichael a letter, and that was the end of it. Some say she committed suicide, and some say she went to Europe and became a preemie donner — a star singer — but anyway, that was the end of her, as far as that region was concerned."

"She was a fine girl," sez I; "though I wish that instead of slippin' off that way, she had asked me to drown the members o' that delegation as inconspicuous as possible. I would n't put on mournin', if the whole outfit of 'em was in the same fix your confounded Greek Religion is. What was her name, Horace?"

"Janet Morris," sez he.

I said it over a time or two to myself; and it seemed to fit her. "I like that name," sez I. "Now tell me the way 'at the Friar cut loose and tied into that vestry. I bet he made trade boom for hospitals and undertakers."

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HAPPY'S NEW AMBITION

Ol' Tank Williams allus maintained that I had a memory like the Lord; but this ain't so. What I do remember, I actually see in pictures, just like I told you; but what my memory chooses to discard is as far out o' my reach as the smoke o' last year's fire. I 've worked at my memory from the day I was weaned, not bein' enough edicated to know 'at the proper way is to put your memory in a book — and then not lose the book. I 've missed a lot through not gettin' on friendly terms with books earlier in life; but then I 've had a lot o' fun with my memory to even things up.

This part about the Friar, though, is n't a fair test. Horace's vestry-man friend was what is known as a short-hand reporter. Short-hand writin' is merely a lot o' dabs and slips which 'd strain a Chinaman; but Horace said it was as plain to read as print letters, and as fast to write as spoke words. Hugo took it down right as it was given; and Horace had a copy which I made him go over with me until I had scratched it into the hardest part o' my memory; and now it is just the same as if I had seen it with my own eyes — me knowin' every tone in the Friar's voice, and the way his eyes shine; yes, and the way his jaws snap off the words when he 's puttin' his heart into a thing.

Horace sat thinkin', before he started on with his tale; and I sat watchin' his face. It was just all I could do to make out the old lines which had give me the creeps a few weeks

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before. Now, it had a fine, solid tan, the eyes were full o' fire, and he looked as free from nerves as a line buckskin. The Friar sez we 're all just bits o' glass through which the spirit shines; and now that I had cleaned Horace up with my nerve treatment, the' was a right smart of spirit shinin' out through him, and I warmed my hands at it. He simply could not learn to roll a cigarette with one hand; but in most things, he was as able a little chap as ever I took the kinks out of.

"I 'm sorry I did n't belong to that vestry," sez Horace, after a bit. "When I look back at all the sportin' chances I 've missed, I feel like kickin' myself up to the North Pole and back. From now on I intend to mix into every bloomin' jambaree 'at exposes itself to the vision of my gaze. I 'm goin' to ride an' shoot an' wrestle an' box an' gamble an' fight, and get every last sensation I 'm entitled to — but I 'll never have another chance at a vestry-meetin' like the one I 'm about to tell you of.

"You saw how toppy Carmichael got this afternoon; so you can guess purty close how he looked when he lined up this vestry."

"Oh, I 've seen the Friar in action," sez I; "and you can't tell me anything about his style. All you can tell is the details. So go to 'em without wastin' any more time."

"How comes it you call such a man as him Friar Tuck?" asked Horace, who allus was as hard to drive as an only son burro.

"Well, I don't approve of it," sez I, "and I kicked about it to the Friar; but he only laughed, and said 'at one name was as good as another. A bettin' barber over at Boggs give it to him for admonishin' a gambler from Cheyenne."

"Was he severe?" asked Horace.

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"Depends on how you look at it," sez I. "He took a club away from the gambler an' spanked him with it; but he did n't injure him a mite."

"Humph," sez Horace, "I guess the name won't rust much while it 's in his keepin'. He took other methods at this vestry meetin', though I don't say they were any more befittin'. Hugo — such was the name of my friend — said it was the quietest, but the most dramatic thing he ever saw.

"They started in by treatin' him like the boy he was, gave him a lot o' copy-book advice, especially as to the value o' patience, how that Paul was to do the plantin', Appolinaris, the waterin'; but that the size an' time o' the harvest depended on the Lord, Himself; and that it was vanity to think 'at a young boy just out o' college could rush things through the way he was tryin' to.

"The' was a hurt look about Carmichael's eyes; but the hurt had come from the letter, not from them, so he sat quiet and smiled down at 'em in a sort of super-human calmness. They thought he was bluffed speechless, so they girded up their loins, an' tied into him a little harder, tellin' him that his conduct in walkin' home nights with a café-singer was little short of immoral, although they would n't make no pointed charge again' the woman herself. Then they wound up by sayin' 'at they feared he was too young to spend so much time amid the environs o' sin, and that they would put an older man in charge o' the annex, and this would leave him free to attend strictly to cu-ratin'.

"When they had spoke their piece, they were all beamin' with the upliftin' effect of it; and they settled back with beautiful smiles o' satisfaction to listen to Carmichael's thanks and repentance. He sat there smilin' too — not smilin'

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the brand o' smiles 'at they were, but still smilin'. It would strain a dictionary to tell all there is in some smiles.

"Presently he rose up, swept his eyes over 'em for a time, and said in a low tone: 'Then I am to understand that I am to follow in the Master's footsteps only as far as personal chastity goes?' said he. 'That I may respectably pity the weak and sinful from a distance; but must not dismount from my exalted pedestal to take 'em by the hand an' lift 'em up — Is that what you mean?' sez he.

"They still thought he was whipped, so one of 'em pulled a little sarcasm on him: 'Takin' the weak an' sinful by the hand an' liftin' 'em up is all right,' said he; 'but it's not necessary to go home with 'em after midnight.'

"Carmichael bit his lips; he tried to hold himself down, he honestly tried for some time; but he was n't quite able. His hands trembled an' his lip trembled while he was fightin' himself; but when he kicked off his hobbles an' sailed into 'em, his tremblin' stopped an' the words shot forth, clear an' hot an' bitish. Hugo sat back in a corner durin' this meetin', without speakin' a single word; and he was glad of it. It saved him from gettin' his feelin's kicked into flinders about him, an' interferin' with the view; and it gave him a chance to take his notes.

"'As a matter o' faith,' said Carmichael, 'we believe that Jesus never sinned; but we cannot know this as a matter of fact. Yet we can know, and we do know, as a matter of history, that He mingled an' had fellowship with the fallen, the sinful, the outcast, and the disreputable. With these He lived, and with these and for these He left the power and the life and the glory of His religion — and you say that I must live in a glass case, may only look in holy dignity down at the weak and sinful; but that I must n't go home with

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'em after midnight. With God, a thousand years is but as a day — and yet it would be wrong for me to be in a sinner's company after midnight!'

"Carmichael paused here to give 'em a comeback at him; but their mouths were dry, and they only hemmed an' hawed. 'Every Sunday, in the service of this refined an' respectable church, hunderds of you admit that you have no health because of your sins — and yet, because of my youth, you say I must remain with you where sin is robed in silk and broadcloth, and not risk my soul where sin is robed in rags.'

"He paused again, and this time his eyes began to shoot jerk-lightning, an' when he started to speak his deep voice shook the room like the low notes of a big organ. 'No,' he said, 'I am not content to walk with the Lord, only on the day of His triumph — The very ones who strewed the pathway of His majesty with palms, and filled the air with hosaners, deserted Him at the cross — but I must walk with Him every step of the way. I do not pray that my earthly garments be spotless, I do not pray that my sandals be unworn an' free from mud; but I do pray that when I stand on my own Calvery I may stand with those who bear crosses, not with those who have spent their lives in learnin' to wear crowns.'

"Carmichael had discarded that entire vestry by this time, and he did n't care a blue-bottle fly what they thought of him. He towered above them with his face shinin', and his voice rolled down over 'em like a Norther sweepin' through the hills. 'Many there were,' he went on, 'who cried to Him, Lord, Lord; but after the tomb was sealed, it was the Magdalene whose faith never faltered, it was to her He first appeared; and on the final resurrection morning, I hope the

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lesser Magdalenes of all the ages, and from all the nasty corners of the world into which man's greed has crowded 'em, will know that I am their brother, and, save for a lovin' hand at the right moment, one of them to the last sordid detail.'

"Carmichael stopped after this, and the room was so quiet you could hear the consciences o' that vestry floppin' up and down again' their pocketbooks. When he began again his voice was soft, an' the bitterness had given way to sadness. 'The old way was best, after all,' he said. 'When you pay a priest a salary, you hire him and he becomes your servant. The custom is, for masters to dictate to their servants; it is an old, old custom, and hard to break. I think I could suit you; but I do not think I shall try. The roots of my own life lead back to the gutter, and through these roots shall I draw strength to lift others from the gutter. I do not value my voice as a means to amuse those already weary of amusement: I look upon it as a tool to help clean up the world. You are already so clean that you fear I may defile you by contagion. You do not need me; and with all your careful business methods, you have not money enough to hire me.

"'What you need here, is a diplomat; while I yearn to be on the firin' line. I care little for the etiquette of religion, I want to get down where the fightin' is fierce an' primitive — so I hereby resign.

"'This girl whom you have driven out of my life, needs no defence from me or any man. I have known her since she was a little child; poverty was her lot, and self-sacrifice has become her second nature. We are forbidden to judge; so I judge neither her nor you; but I will say that often I have stood silent before the beauty of her character, and

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often my face has burned at the tainted money you have put on the plate. Part of this money comes from the rental of dives. I have seen the dives themselves, I have seen their fearful product; and I cannot believe that profit wrung from a helpless slave can find its way to God — even on the contribution plate.

"'I love the music an' the service an' the vestments o' this church; and I hope I need not give them up; but my heart is in rebellion, and from this time on I take the full responsibility of my acts. I shall not choose my path; but will go as the spirit moves me; and if ever I find one single spot which seems too dark for the Light of the world to enter, then shall the soul in me shrivel and die, and I shall become a beast, howling in the jungle.'"

Horace said that after the Friar had left the room, those vestry fellers sat in a sort of daze for some time, and then got up an' sneaked out one at a time, lookin' exceeding thoughtful; while Hugo had hustled around to his room to read off his notes.

We sat there on the hill until dark, me tryin' to pump him for more details, but he did n't have 'em. He said the Friar had started to work in the slums; but was soon lost sight of, and the first he had heard of him for years was when he had come up the pass, singin' his marchin' song. Course, I 'd liked it some better if the Friar had knocked their heads together; but still, takin' his eyes an' voice into consideration, it must 'a' been a fine sight; and if ever I get the chance, I 'm goin' to take on as a vestry-man, myself, for at least one term.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TENDER FEELINGS

Me an' Horace was regular chums after this. I had got to likin' him after he had showed up good stuff under treatment; but I never took him serious until he got enthusiastic about Friar Tuck. This proved him to have desirable qualities and made him altogether worth while. A man never gets too old to dote on flattery; but the older he gets the more particular he is about its quality. It 's just like tobacco an' pie an' whiskey an' such things: we start out hungry for 'em an' take a lot o' trouble to get 'em in quantity; but after a time we 'd sooner go without altogether than not to have a superior article; an' it 's just the same way with flattery.

I took Horace into my most thoughtful moods as soon as I found out that he was as sound as a nut at heart, an' that it was n't altogether his fault that he had been a pest to me at first. The human mind is like new land, some of it 's rich an' some poor. Facts is like manure, idees is like seed, an' education is like spadin' up an' hoein' an' rakin'. Rich soil is bound to raise somethin', even if it 's nothin' but weeds; but poor soil needs special care, or it won't even raise weeds. Now, manure can be put on so thick it will turn ground sour, an' seeds can be sowed so thick they will choke each other, an' a green hand will sometimes hoe up the vegetables an' cultivate the weeds; but the soil ain't to blame for this.

Poor Horace's mind had been bungled to an infernal de-

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gree; an' it kept me busy rootin' up sprouts o' Greek religion. I 'd have stood this better if the Greek gods an' godduses had had Christian names; 'cause I own up 'at some o' his tales of 'em was interestin'; but I could n't keep track of 'em, an' so I made him discard 'em in his conversations with me; an' the way he flattered me was, to reform himself accordin' to what I demanded.

I was teachin' him how to shoot, an' he was enjoyin' it a lot. He had plenty o' money, and took pleasure in spendin' it. This was good, 'cause it costs a lot o' money to become a good shot. I 'm glad I don't know what it cost me to learn how to shoot a man through both ears after doin' the double reverse roll. I never had but one fit chance to use this, an' then I shot Frenchy through his ears without rememberin' to use the roll. I allus felt bad about this, 'cause I had a good audience, an' nothin' saves a man from the necessity o' shootin' his fellows, so much as havin' it well advertised that he is thoroughly qualified to do it in proper style. I kept up my own practicin' while teachin' Horace, an' we had right sociable times.

He could throw up a tin can with his left hand, pull his gun and, about once out o' ten shots, hit the can before it fell; which is purty fair shootin'; but he was beginnin' to suspect that he was a regular gun-man; which is a dangerous idee for any one to get into his head. I tried to weight down his head a little to keep him sensible, but instead o' thankin' me he went off with Tank, who shot up a lot of his catridges at target practice; and in return, puffed up the top-heavy opinion Horace already had of himself.

He took Horace down to a warm cañon where the' was a lot o' rattlesnakes, claimin' it was necessary to test him out an' see if he had nerve on a livin' creature. He shot off the

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heads o' three snakes, hand-runnin', an' it nearly broke his hatband.

When he told me about it, I let him know 'at Tank was only workin' him. "A rattlesnake will strike at a flash, Horace," sez I; "an' it was the snake's eyes which were accurate, not yours." This cut him up an' made him a little offish with me for a few days, until he found I had told him the truth. Ol' Tank Williams was n't no fancy shot; but I 'd rather have tackled Horace with a gun, cocked in his hand, than ol' Tank, with his gun asleep in its holster.

After Horace had made the test of shootin' at dead snakes an' had found that he could n't pop off three heads hand-runnin', he simmered down a little an' paid more heed to what I told him; but after I had proved that I told him straighter stuff 'n Tank did, I decided it would be necessary to punish him a little. I did n't get downright cold with him, because I did n't want to exagerate his vanity any more 'n it already was; but I made it a point to do my loafin' with Spider Kelley. Horace was crazy to go bear-huntin'; but I did n't seem interested, an' I recommended ol' Tank Williams as bein' some the best bear-hunter the' was in existence. I was n't jealous of Horace goin' off shootin' with Tank; but still if a feller chooses to dispense with my company, I allus like to show him 'at I can stand it as long as he can.

Quite a string o' years had slipped away since the bettin' barber o' Boggs had strung ol' man Dort; so I reminded Spider 'at we had agreed to help even that up sometime; and Spider, he said he was ready to do his part, whatever it happened to be; so we planned idees out among ourselves, while Horace hung around lookin' wishful.

We had never given it away about the woodchuck not bein' a regular squirrel; so the boys still used to congregate

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together purty often at ol' man Dort's to marvel at the way Columbus had filled out an' took on flesh. He had got rough an' blotchy soon after he had won the contest from Ben Butler, the red squirrel, an' it was plain to all that Eugene had done some high-toned barberin' on him before the day o' the show.

Ol' man Dort did n't have no affection for Columbus — fact is, he sort o' hated him for bein' bigger 'n Ben Butler; but he kept him fat an' fit so as to be ready to enter in a contest the minute any feller came along with a squirrel he thought was big enough to back up with a bet. The trouble was, that mighty few fellers out that way owned any squirrels, an' as the years dragged by without him gettin' any pastime out o' Columbus, ol' man Dort's affection for him grew thinner an' thinner. Some o' the boys discovered him to be a woodchuck; but no one told of it for fear the old man would slaughter Eugene.

The old man kept on gettin' barbered, so as to have the chance o' clashin' with Eugene about every subject which came up; but finally he got so he could be shaved in a decent, orderly manner without havin' his head tied down to the rest. Him an' Eugene was the most antagonistic fellers I ever met up with; but it was a long time before me an' Spider could think up a way to get 'em fairly at it again.

One day Spider came ridin' in from Danders, bubblin' over with excitement, and yells out — "Pete Peabody 's got a freak guinea-pig."

"That 's glorious news," sez I. "Let 's get all the boys together an' hold a celebration."

"I guess a freak guinea-pig 's as worthy o' bein' commented on as airy other kind of freak," sez Spider, stridin' off to the corral, purty well pouted up.

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He had n't more 'n reached it before an idee reached me, an' I ran after him. "What is the' freakish about this guinea-pig, Spider?" sez I.

"He 's got a tail," snapped Spider.

"Ain't they all got tails?" sez I.

"You know they ain't," he sez. "You remember what that feller from the East said last spring — if you hold up a guinea-pig by the tail, his eyes fall out, an' then when we did n't believe it, he told us they did n't have no tails. Pete sez that this guinea-pig is the only one in the world what has a tail."

"Do you reckon he 'd sell it?"

"He 'd sell the hair off his head," sez Spider.

"Well, you go back there an' — But say, has Pete got any others?"

"He had ten when I left, an' no knowin' how many he 's got by this time. Pete sez 'at guinea-pigs is the prolificest things the' is," sez Spider.

"You buy three of 'em, Spider," sez I; "a male one an' a female one, an' this here freak."

"What do I want with 'em?" sez Spider.

"I 'll pay half, an' show you how to make money out of 'em," sez I.

"I don't want to tinker with no such cattle as them," sez Spider.

"You get a fresh pony, an' it won't take you no time at all," sez I.

So Spider got the pony an' went off grumblin'. When he brought 'em back he had 'em in a small box an' they certainly was curious lookin' insects. "I paid four bits apiece for the male an' the female," sez Spider, "an' twenty-five real dollars for the freak."

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"If that 's the way prices run," sez I, "it ain't no wonder that guinea-pigs what are ambitious to be popular, are willin' to give up the luxury o' tails."

"Now then, what in thunder are we goin' to do with 'em?" sez Spider.

"Get a fresh pony," sez I, "an' we 'll go on over to Boggs."

"You go to the equator!" yells Spider. "I ain't had no sleep for a week."

"Sleep," sez I, "what 's the use o' botherin' about sleep? You keep on losin' your strength this way, an' in about a year they 'll be trundlin' you around in a baby cart. All right then, you stay home an' be company for the freak. We 'll hide him up in the attic so the rats can't get him."

"Oh I could stand it to go without sleep, if I saw any sense in it," sez Spider; "but hanged if I 'm goin' to ride my bones through my skin just to please you."

"Suit yourself," sez I. "We 'll put the freak in the tin cake-box an' punch a few holes in it to give him air. I 'll do that while you 're makin' up your mind about goin' along to Boggs."

"What you goin' to do with the male an' the female?" sez Spider as I started away.

"I 'm goin' to sell 'em to Eugene," I calls back over my shoulder, an' then I knew I 'd have company.

"I thought you was goin' to Boggs," sez Spider as soon as we had settled into a travelin' trot. I allus find that I get along easier with people if I just leave 'em one or two items to puzzle over.

"Webb Station is closer," sez I; "an' if this deal causes any hard feelin' it will be just as well not to be mixed up in it ourselves."

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"I thought you was goin' to sell these to Eugene?" sez Spider.

"If you 'd just go to sleep, Spider," sez I, "it would save your brain the trouble o' thinkin' up a lot o' thoughts which ain't no use anyhow. I 'm goin' to let Shorty take 'em over this evenin' an' sell 'em to Eugene."

"How do you know he wants 'em?"

"'Cause I know Eugene," sez I. "I 'll fix up Shorty's tale for him."

Well, we explained to Shorty the bettin' principle of guinea-pigs, an' gave him the pigs, tellin' him he could have all he won from Eugene on the first bet; but to then sell 'em to Eugene without lettin' any o' the other fellers know anything about it, an' to make Eugene think that he had picked 'em up from a train passenger, not from us.

Shorty said that he 'd go over that afternoon as soon as the passenger had gone — Shorty was the telegraph operator — so Spider an' I came back, he sleepin' all the way.

"Where do we come in on this deal?" sez Spider next day.

"We 'll give Eugene a chance to cut their hair a new way, an' then we 'll go over to Boggs an' line things up."

"I 'm beginnin' to see how it could be worked out," sez Spider, grinnin'.

In about a week we went over to Boggs, an' found the town purty well deserted. We dropped into ol' man Dort's to compliment Columbus some an' sympathize with Ben Butler a little, while tryin' to hear if Eugene had made his play yet. The ol' man was gloatin' over the fact that Eugene was n't havin' much trade, but he did n't mention anything about guinea-pigs.

"You don't seem rushed, yourself," sez I.

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"Course I ain't," he flares back. "Most o' the fellers are still roundin' up, an' the rest are out huntin' for Red Erickson."

"Red been gettin' thoughtless again?" sez I. Red Erickson was a big Dane who had the habit o' runnin off stock an' shootin' any one who disagreed with him.

The ol' man merely pointed to a paper pinned up on the wall offerin' fifteen hundred dollars for Red, dead or alive. He had n't been operatin' on Diamond Dot stuff, so we had n't paid much heed to him.

We strolled on over to Eugene's an' found him sittin' down an' talkin' about the peculiar custom o' guinea-pigs; so we knew that he had swallered the bait; but he did n't offer to bet with us.

Then we went back an' asked ol' man Dort if he believed that a guinea-pig's eyes would fall out if he was held up by the tail.

"It 's all rot!" sez the ol' man, indignant. "Any one who sez such nonsense never studied the way eyes is fastened in. The tail ain't got nothin' to do with it."

"What kind o' tails has guinea-pigs got?" sez I.

"Why they got —" sez the ol' man, an' then stopped an' looked blank. "What kind o' tails have they got?"

"They have n't got any," sez I. "Now listen; would you be willin' to risk a little money to even up with Eugene?"

"I 'd risk every thing I got, down to my very hide," sez the ol' man, earnest to a degree.

"Well, then, you play careful an' we 'll provide you with the cards," sez I. "Eugene has some guinea-pigs, an' he is plannin' to string you on a bet. You come right along just as though you was as ignorant as you look, have a day fixed to decide the bet, let us know, an' for the small sum

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of fifty dollars we 'll provide you with a guinea-pig which has a tail."

"I 'll make a pauper out of him," sez the ol' man. "I have n't had a chance to get a bet on Columbus since I owned him."

"You just land Eugene," sez I, "an' that 'll be sport enough for one while."

"I got shaved twice to-day," sez the ol' man feelin' his chin, "'cause we got into a discussion about comets; but I reckon I can stand another to-morrow."

The next day the old man asked Eugene what all kind o' game grew in Africa. "Elephants, hippopotamusses an' guinea-pigs," sez Eugene.

"Guinea-pigs?" sez the ol' man.

"Yes, they 're the most curious animals the' is in existence," sez Eugene.

"How big are they?" asked ol' man Dort. He had n't an idea in the world, an' was beginnin' to think that if they sized up with elephants an' hippopotamusses, he did n't want to have to lift one by the tail to win his bet.

"They ain't any bigger 'n young rabbits," sez Eugene, stroppin' his razor; "but the curious part of 'em is that if you hold up one by the tail, his eyes 'll drop out."

"I 'll bet a hundred dollars they would n't do it," sez the ol' man.

"That 's a safe enough bet," sez Eugene, calm an' easy. "They 're worth all the way up to five hundred dollars a pair, an' it ain't likely that a man would invest that amount in something, just to win a hundred-dollar bet."

They sparred back an' forth for a couple o' days until finally Eugene bet nine hundred in cash — all he had in the world — an' his shop an' fixin's, again' eleven hundred dol-

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lars, that the old man could n't lift a guinea-pig by the tail without his eyes fallin' out. If the ol' man did n't lift one by the tail, he lost the bet. They set the date for a week ahead, an' the ol' man bet Eugene three hundred dollars that he 'd win the bet, takin' Eugene's promissory agreement for his end of it.

We brought in the freak the day before the contest an' the ol' man's eyes lit up when he see the tail. It was n't much of a tail at that; but it was a sure enough tail an' plenty long enough to lift him by, an' strong enough too, an' the' was regular bones in it, just like any tail.

The' was only a fair sized crowd of us on hand to see the test; but Eugene went through all the preliminaries, an' then took the cover off his box an' pointed to the guinea-pigs. He had shaved the parts of 'em where tails naturally belong, an' when the boys see that they did n't have no tails, they howled with laughter an' began to hoot ol' man Dort; an' Eugene confided to 'em the plans he had for spendin' the money he 'd won.

Ol' man Dort, he walked calmly up to the box, examined the guinea-pigs, an sez: "These here is not the full-blooded guinea-pigs. The full-blooded ones live in a mountaineous country an' use their tails to steer with when they jump from rock to rock; while this kind live in swamps an' the young aligators keep on eatin' off their tails until they don't have any. I 'll go get a thoroughbred an' do my liftin' on him."

Well this set 'em back a good ways; an' as the ol' man was walkin' off to get his own speciment, a good many bets was put up, but Eugene did n't take any.

Purty soon, back come the ol' man; an' hanged if he had n't clipped the hair off o' his one's tail too. He reached

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in his hand an' stroked the long-faced little duffer, an' sez: "Gently, George the Third, gently." Then he put on an anxious look an' picked up the guinea-pig by the tail, holdin' his other hand underneath to catch any eyes what happened to spill out. They did n't none drop out, an' the crowd give a cheer; but Eugene was all in.

He was a bad loser was Eugene, an' he did n't join in the festivities any. He just took up his two guineas an' went back to his shop, while the rest of us celebrated a few. After a time me an' Spider went to console with him a little. He was so infernally down in the mouth that I began to get a little conscience-struck. Eugene said he had been savin' up his money to pay off the mortgage on his birth-place; an' he made a purty sad story out of it. Fact was, that he made so sad a story out of it that I decided to get him back his tools and give him a new start.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THEMIS IN THE ROCKIES

"How much money you got, Spider?" I sez.

"I reckon I got sixty dollars," sez Spider.

"I don't mean just what you got with ya, I mean how much cash do you possess in the world."

"I suppose I could raise a hundred an' fifteen," sez Spider, after thinkin' a while. "What do you want to know for?"

"We got to give Eugene a start," sez I.

Spider looked at me until he saw I was in earnest, an' then he talked out loud. "What 's the matter with you?" he yells. "We have n't adopted Eugene, have we? Why-for do we have to give him a start? Did n't he lose at his own game. Great Snakes! You make me tired!"

"That was a low-down trick we played," sez I.

"It was n't no lower down 'n him ringin' in a woodchuck on the old man; and all we did it for was to square things up."

"Yes," sez I; "but it took us some several years to square it up, and I don't intend to have Eugene's moanful voice surgin' through my ears until I 'm able to think up a come-back for him. I 'm goin' to give him a start, and if you don't feel like riskin' your money, I 'll do it alone."

"Do you mean 'at you 're just goin' to pay over the price of his tools, an' let it go at that?" sez Spider.

"That would n't be any fun," sez I. "I 'm goin' to get the tools; but I intend to get 'em for as little expense as

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possible, and if I can have a little fun out of it, I don't intend to pass it up."

Spider studied it over a while. "Well, I 'll risk fifty," he sez after a bit; so we went back to Eugene's.

"Would you be willin' to do a stunt to get back your tools?" sez I.

He raised a pair o' weepy eyes to me an' sez: "Aw, the' ain't no show. I 've a good mind to kill myself."

"Please don't do that," sez Spider, who never could stand a bad loser. "When you lose your money, you allus stand a chance to win more money; but when you lose your life, why, the' ain't nothin' left except to go up an' find out what reward it earned for you."

"Aw hell," muttered Eugene.

"Ye–es," agreed Spider, talkin' through his nose, like a missionary preacher, "I reckon that is about what you 'd draw, if you was to cash in now; but if you stick around an' do your duty, you run the risk o' havin' better luck later on."

After Spider had insulted Eugene until he began to sass back a little, I broke in and sez that if Eugene will agree to do what I tell him, I 'll agree to get him back his outfit; so then he wants to know what I have in mind.

"Are you willin' to disguise yourself as a genuwine mountain trapper?" sez I.

When I sez this, Spider exploded a laugh which would 'a' hurt the feelin's of a sheep, and Eugene tied into us as wordy as a fox terrier; but I soothed him down an' told him I was in earnest. "I 'm willin' to do most anything to get my tools back," sez Eugene; "but I don't see how I can make myself look like a genuwine trapper."

"Have you got any false wigs and beards?" sez I.

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"No, I have n't," sez he; "but I saved up the stuff I reaped off o' ol' man Dort, and I reckon I could make some."

"The very thing!" sez I. "You fix up a rig that 'll make you look to be a hundred years old; and we 'll hunt up clothes for ya. All you 'll have to do will be to guide a green Eastener out to shoot a bear, and we 'll have the bear and everything ready for ya."

"No, ya don't," sez Eugene. "I don't fool around no bears."

"I thought you was tired o' life," sez Spider.

"Well, I 'm not so tired of it that I 'm willin' to have it squeezed out o' me by a bear," sez Eugene.

"This won't be a real bear," sez I; "and anyhow, they 'll be a ravine between you and it. You claimed once to be a show actor, and all you 'll have to do will be to pertend 'at you 're actin'."

"I once was a genuwine amateur actor," sez Eugene, "and if you 'll make it clear to me that there ain't no danger, I 'll take the job."

Then I explained just what he had to do; and after this me an' Spider, who was now keen for the outcome, went around to dicker with ol' man Dort. He was bumpin' around among the clouds, so we did n't have any trouble in buyin' back Eugene's stuff on time. When I asked him what he 'd charge for Columbus, the woodchuck, he gave a snort, and said he 'd throw him in for good measure; so I told him to just keep him out o' sight for a few days, and we started back to Eugene's.

"What do you want with that dog-gone woodchuck?" asked Spider.

"I want him to take the part of a grizzly bear," sez I.

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Spider stopped an' looked at me. "This is goin' too far," sez he. "It 's bad enough to try to fool some one into believin' 'at Eugene 's a genuwine trapper; but you could n't make a rag doll believe 'at Columbus was a grizzly bear."

"You go borrow that squaw dress from Ike Spargle, an' then we 'll see how much like a trapper Eugene 'll look," sez I.

I went on an' found 'at Eugene had done a master job o' wig makin', even fixin' false eyebrows, an' when he put on ol' man Dort's hair-crop he looked older 'n the human race. As soon as Spider came in with the squaw dress, we put it on Eugene; and while he did n't look like anything I 'd ever seen before, he looked more like the first man 'at ever started trappin' than like anything else, an' Spider Kelley nearly had a convulsion.

We bunked with Eugene that night; but he kept us awake bemoanin' his cruel fate until Spider threatened to drown him head first in a bucket o' water and after that we had a little go at slumberin'. I routed 'em out about two an' drilled 'em up to the high ground above Spear Crick, where we waited until sun-up. Eugene was wearin' his trapper riggin', and in the starlight, he sure was a ghastly sight.

Just across from us on the other side o' the crick was Sholte's Knoll, and when the sun rose, I lined us up to be just in a direct line with it across the knoll. Both Eugene and Spider bothered me with questions and discouragin' kicks; but I felt purty sure my scheme would work, and only told 'em what was really for their good.

The crick ran south in a gorge, and just below us it ran into Rock River, which came from the east and made a sharp turn to the south just where Spear Crick ran into it. After the sun was up, we climbed down a circlin' trail until

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we came to Rock River. Eugene refused to try to ford it; but Spider and I went across and up to Ivan's Knoll. Rock River was bigger than Spear Crick, and Ivan's Knoll was bigger than Sholte's Knoll; but not one tenderfoot in a million could have told 'em apart, and Spider got gleeful at the plan — except that he kept at me to know who I was tryin' to land. Back of Ivan's Knoll was a round hole about ten feet across, called the Bottomless Pit, because the' was no bottom to it. After examinin' this place, we went on and crossed Rock River again until we came out at Sholte's Knoll across from where the shootin' was to be done.

"What you are to do, Spider," sez I, "is to be at this place before dawn with Columbus tied by a stout cord. Tie him to the rock at the south end of the knoll by a weak cord, then pass your stout cord up over that jag o' rock at the top, and just as soon as the sun hits the knoll, pull hard enough to break the weak cord, lead him gently up the slope until he has been shot at several times, then — "

"Is Eugene, that genuwine, ancient trapper goin' to do the shootin'?" interrupted Spider.

"He is not," sez I. "If Columbus gets shot, all you 'll have to do will be to wind around to Boggs and meet me there. If he don't get shot, you can either turn him adrift, kill him yourself, or pack him back to ol' man Dort's, accordin' to the dictates o' your own conscience. I 'll bring the party 'at does the shootin' up to Ivan's Knoll, an' make him think the bear has fallen down the Bottomless Pit after he was shot."

"Happy," sez Spider, "hanged if I believe it 'll go through; and I won't be a sucker unless you tell me who is to do the shootin'."

"Horace," sez I, "Horace Walpole Bradford."

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Spider's face changed expression a half dozen times in two moments; but he did n't have any more kicks; so we went back to Eugene, and took him up to a deserted cabin, where he was to stay until needed. I left him and Spider to fix up the cabin, while I went back to the Dot to fix up Horace. Horace had a lot o' money; but it did go again' me to make him pay for Engene's outfit by puttin' up a practical joke on him. Still, I felt called upon to square it up with Eugene, and this seemed the fairest way.

When I reached the Dot, Horace came forth to meet me; and he was so glad to see me 'at I purt' nigh gave up the scheme; but I had gone too far to back out now, so I acted cool, and cut him short with my answers.

After supper I got Tank started on bear. He saw I had something up my sleeve, so he talked bear until Horace's mouth began to water. "I 'd give a hundred dollars, just to get a shot at a bear," sez Horace.

"This ain't the time o' the year to hunt bear," sez I. "Food 's so common at this season that a bear spends most of his time loafin'; and it 's hard to get sight o' one. Course, if you was to go to a professional hunter, he 'd know where bears were spendin' their vacation; but it might take a month for one of us to root one out."

"Do you know of any professional hunters?" sez he.

I did n't say nothin', and Tank told of some he knew several hundred miles off. After Tank had talked himself out, I mentioned careless like that old Pierre La Blanc was livin' less 'n twenty miles away; but that I doubted if he 'd take a bear-huntin' job. I went on to state that he had money saved up, and it would take a sight o' coin to tempt him.

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"I 'd give five hundred dollars for a shot at a real grizzly," sez Horace.

"Did you ever use a rifle?" sez I.

"Ask Tank," sez Horace.

Tank told about Horace havin' borrowed ol' Cast Steel's forty-five-seventy, and that he had learned to hit a mark with it in able shape. Before we turned in that night, I had let Horace tease me into takin' him over to Pierre's next day.

We reached the old cabin next afternoon, and found it lookin' purty comfortable. Eugene had soiled his hands and what part of his face showed; and he certainly did look outlandish. He could act some, I 'll say that for him; and he pertended so natural that it took Tank a half hour to tell who he was. He did n't talk much, but when he did he used broken French, and he made a contract with Horace to get the five hundred as soon as he had showed him the bear, Tank to hold the check.

Eugene could n't get food through his whiskers; so he said most of his teeth were gone, and et his supper in private. After supper, I stole down the gulch and found Spider waitin'. He promised to be on hand the next mornin' and we turned in early.

Next mornin' we started at three, and took up our place at the mark I had made across from Sholte's Knoll. Horace thought it perfectly wonderful that the old trapper would know exactly where a grizzly bear would be at sun-up; and he chattered constant in a hushed voice. We told him it was a full quarter across to the knoll, and he had a regular ecstasy about how deceivin' the atmosphere was — which was rank libel, the atmosphere bein' about the least deceivin' member o' that party.

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Presently, I caught the smell o' dawn, and I told Horace to keep his eyes glued on Chimney Peak, a little over twenty miles to the west. He did so, and in about five minutes, a gob o' rich crimson splashed on it, rippled down the sides, and poured along the foothills at the bottom. Horace gave a gasp. You don't see such a dawn as that with your eyes alone; you see it with somethin' inside your bosom; and when I saw the gleam in Horace's eyes, it made me feel ashamed of what I was up to; but I could n't stop just for this; so I nudged Eugene, and that hoary old trapper growled out to Horace to watch the knoll, or he 'd miss his chance.

Horace was surprised to see the east still in a black shadow. He started to speak words about it, but just then the sun, lookin' like an acre of red fire, jumped up from behind Sholte's Knoll like a sacred jack-rabbit.

The knoll was consid'able higher than us, and just as the sun was half-circle behind it, a gigantic form started to walk across it from south to north. I knew, positive, that this was Columbus the woodchuck; but it was just all I could do to believe it, myself, and Horace thought it was the biggest silver-tip in creation. I did n't think the woodchuck ran much risk of gettin' shot; but Horace did n't lose his nerve a particle. He banged away, Columbus gave a lurch, took a snap at his side, and rolled out o' sight behind the knoll, as natural as a fried egg.

Horace jumped up and down, hugged himself, slapped us on the back, and almost knocked the aged trapper's fur off; but if he had, I doubt if he would have noticed it, he was so eager to get to his first bear.

We wound down the path, and he complained about it bein' so much farther 'n he had expected; but I spoke a

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few words about the atmosphere, and he was soothed. When we struck Rock River, he was surprised to see how much wider it was than it looked from where he 'd shot; but he did n't falter none about goin' in; while I purt' nigh had to twist off the seasoned trapper's arm before he 'd get his feet wet. The water was purty high, and Tank and I had our hands full gettin' 'em across.

We climbed the trail on the other side to Ivan's Knoll. This was about a mile south o' Sholte's Knoll, and naturally I did n't expect to find any game on the other side of it; so you can judge my feelin's when we got around to the other side, and saw that woodchuck's carcass, lyin' flat on its back with its front feet folded across a piece o' paper.

Horace saw it, too; but he was n't interested at first, and dove all about, lookin' for his bear. He was plumb wild; but finally he picked up the piece o' paper, and read what was wrote on it in scrawly letters, which I knew to be the work o' Spider Kelley: " Before I was shot I was a grizzly bar but it made me feel so small to get shot by a tenderfoot that I have shrank to what you see befor you."

That confounded Kelley had n't been able to resist workin' the joke back on me; so he had toted Columbus down from Sholte's Knoll, and then skipped. I knew I would n't see him for some time — but I also knew I would n't forget what was comin' to him when I did.

Horace read the note through in silence, then he looked at the remains of the woodchuck, then he read the note again, and his face got like a sunset. He read the note once more, and then he leaped through the air for that veteran trapper, and grabbed him by the beard. The beard and wig came off in his hands, and Eugene started to flee, with Horace a close second, kickin' the seat o' that squaw dress at

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every jump. Horace was in able shape, and Eugene was flimsy; so when he tripped and rolled over, Horace got him by the ears, and proceeded to beat his head on a stone, the way Tank had told about doin' to the unobligin' old miner.

I pulled Horace off to save Eugene's life, and then Horace pulled out a gun and tried to take my life. It took us two solid hours to cool Horace down below the boilin' point; and then he started off alone with his lips set and his eyebrows pulled down to the bridge of his nose. I liked him better 'n ever. He was as game as they made 'em, and had even forgot the check 'at ol' Tank Williams was still holdin'; but I was honestly worried about Eugene.

Part of it may have been due to havin' his head beat mellow on a stone; but still he allus did lack sand when he was losin', and now he sat tuggin' at his real hair an' swearin' he was ruined, and would take his own life the first chance he had. It was partly my fault; so I made Tank help me tote back Eugene's needin's from the deserted cabin to his shop, Eugene goin' along in a stupor and repeatin' to us constant that he intended to drink his own heart's blood.

I sent Tank back to the Dot to see what he could do toward pacifyin' Horace, and then I returned the squaw dress to Ike Spargle. He broke into a side-split when I stepped into his place, and fairly daluged me with liquor; but I was n't in no mood for it. Ike told me 'at Spider had gone out to the Dot to notify that he had quit temporary; and then he was goin' out to hunt down Red Erickson for the bounty. Ike was equally willin' to talk about bears or Red Erickson; but I was n't conversational, so I went back to Eugene's.

He had his door locked, and at first refused me admittance; but finally he let me in, and I told him I would let him have his outfit on time. He would n't scarcely listen

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to me; so the best I could do was to get his promise that he would n't slay himself inside the house, as the boys were superstitious again' it, and would burn it down. As it was again' my credit at ol' man Dort's, I felt more agreeable toward payin' for a standin' house, than for just the ashes of one.

"When I 'm gone, Happy," sez Eugene, "I want you to send my watch back to Sommersville, Connecticut. That 's all I ask of ya. You 've been as near a friend to me as any one in this ungodly community has, and I don't bear ya no ill will. If I could just have paid off that mortgage —"

I shook hands with him and went outside, where I settled myself comfortable and made ready to keep watch on him until he started to drink. I felt sure that if he 'd once get to elevatin' a bottle, it would take his mind off suicide; but he paced up and down inside his room until I was purt' nigh out o' my own head.

It must have been nine in the evenin' when he stole out his side door with a forty-five under his coat; and started up the ravine which opens west o' town, and I follered like a coyote.

He went up it about a mile, an' then he stopped an' I flattened out an' crept closer an' closer. I knew he would make a few remarks first, even though he was alone, an' I judged I could wriggle up close enough to grab him in the act.

He fished out his gun, an' I see that he did n't savvy the use of it, which put a little uncertainty into my end o' the game.

"Farewell, cruel world," he muttered mournfully, usin' his gun to gesture with. "Farewell, sweet dreams of childhood; farewell ambition an' love an' dear tyranic duty; farewell moon an' stars an' gentle breezes, farewell —"

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Eugene would probably have gone on sayin' farewell to each particular thing in the world until he talked himself to sleep, but just then a pebble slipped from the side o' the ravine and rolled to his feet, and he stopped with a jerk an' listened. Then he straightened himself an' sez in a determined tone: "Nobody can't prevent me. I shall end it now."

Before I could move, he placed the muzzle to his forehead an' fired, rollin' over on his back. I heard a sort of cough, like when a man hits his best with an ax, an' somethin' came plumpin' down the ravine like an avalanche.

I rushed up, lit a match, an' there on his back was Eugene, a small red welt on his forehead, but looking calm and satisfied, while almost on top of him lay a man in a heap. I straightened him out, lit another match, an' looked at the stranger. His hair was flamin' red an' you could have tied his red mustaches around the back of his neck. He was shot through the forehead an' plumb dead.

I saw how it was in a flash: Eugene had almost missed himself, but had shot Red Erickson, who had been hidin' up the side of the ravine behind him. I slipped Red's empty gun into his hand, emptied Eugene's gun; an' then I tore for town, gathered up the boys an' told 'em that Eugene had gone up the ravine bent on mischief. We got a lantern and hurried up the ravine where Eugene was just comin' back to genuwine consciousness again.

He sat there with his head in his hands tryin' to cheer himself with some o' the mournfullest moanin' ever I heard. I held the lantern to Red's face a moment an' bawled out: "Boys, this is Red Erickson! Him an' Eugene has been duelin', an' they have killed each other."

This gave Eugene his cue — an' a cue was all Eugene

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ever needed. He pulled himself together, took plenty o' time to get the lay o' the land; an' then he gave us a tale o' that fight which laid over anything I ever heard in that line.

We carried 'em back to town, an' Eugene was a hero for true. He got the reward all right, paid off his debts, an' kept addin' details to that fight until it was enough to keep a feller awake nights. His reputation picked up right along until even ol' man Dort had to admit the' was more to Eugene than he had allowed.

Next day when I got back to the Diamond Dot, I found Horace all packed up for leavin'; and it made me feel mournful to the bones o' my soul. I did n't know how much I thought of him until he started to pull out; and I felt so ashamed at what I had done, that I offered to let him kick me all about the place if he 'd just forget about it and stick along.

But Horace had a stiff neck, all right, and he would n't give in. Tank had had all he could do to get Horace to take the check back; and now, try as I would, I could n't get him to stay. I drove over to the station with him, and we had a long talk together. He was in a good humor when he left, and I could see he was wishful to stay; but havin' made up his mind, he stuck to it. He said he had had more fun while with us than durin' all the procedure of his life; and that if we had just kept the joke among us Dotters, he would n't have felt so cut up about it. I told him he had acted just right and that I had acted dead wrong, although it was him takin' Tank's word above mine which had first made me sore.

This was new light to him, and he softened up immediate. Fact was, we got purt' nigh girlish before the train

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pulled out with him wavin' his handkerchief from the back porch.

I still feel some shame about this episode; and if any o' you fellers ask any more questions to lead me into tellin' of my own silly pranks, why, I 'll drive you off the place, and then get my lips sewed shut.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

KIT MURRAY

AFTER Horace had left, I felt purty lonely for a while. It 's hard for me to look back and keep things in regular order; because the different lines cross each other and get mixed up. Always, little Barbie's affairs came first with me; but I reckon most of you have heard her story, so I 'm keepin' shy of it this time. First of all there was my innermost life, which would have been mostly mine no matter where I 'd gone; then there was the part of my life which touched Barbie's, and this was the best and the highest part of it; and then there was the part which touched Friar Tuck an' a lot of others, each one of which helped to make me what I am; but back of it all was my work; so it 's not strange if I find it hard to stick to the trail of a story.

Anyway, it was while I was feelin' lonesome about Horace leavin' that the Friar first began to use me as a trump card, and called on me for whatever he happened to want done. I was mighty fond o' bein' with the Friar; so I lent myself to him whenever I could, and we got mighty well acquainted. He loved fun of a quiet kind; but the' was allus a sadness in his eyes which toned down my natural devilment and softened me. The' was lots o' things I used to enjoy doin', which I just could n't do after havin' been with the Friar a spell, until I had give myself a good shakin', like a dog comin' up out o' water.

For several quiet years about this time, I used to act as

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scout for him, now and again, goin' ahead to round up a bunch when he had time to give 'em a preachin'; or goin' after him when some one who could n't afford a doctor was took sick. We talked about purt' nigh everything, except that some way, we did n't talk much about women; so I was never able to pump his own story out of him, though he knew exactly how I felt toward Barbie, long before I did myself.

Durin' these years, the Friar tried his best to get on terms with the Ty Jones crowd; but they refused to get friendly, and the more he did to make things better in the territory, the more they hated him.

It was right after the spring round-up that I first heard the Friar's name mixed up with a woman. This allus makes me madder 'n about anything else. When a man and a woman sin, why, it 's bad enough, and I 'm not upholdin' it; but still in a way it 's natural, the same as a wolf killin' a calf. It 's the cow-puncher's business to kill the wolf if he can, and he ought to do it as prompt as possible. This is all right; but gossip and scandal is never all right.

Gossip and scandal is like supposin' the wolf had only wounded the calf a little, and a posse would gather and tie the two of 'em together, the wolf and the wounded calf; and take 'em into the center square of a town and keep 'em tied there for all to see until they had starved to death; and then to keep on stirrin' up the carrion day after day as long as a shred of it remained.

The Friar was allus a great one to be talkin' about the power of habits. He said that if folks would just get into the habit of lookin' for sunshiny days, an' smilin' faces an' noble deeds, and such like, that first thing they knew they 'd think the whole world had changed for the better; but in-

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stead o' this they got into the habit of lookin' for evil, and as that was what they were on the watch for, o' course they found it. He said it was like a cat watchin' for a mouse. The cat would plant herself in front of the mouse hole and not do anything else but just watch for the mouse. While she would be on guard, a king might be assassinated, a city might fall in an earthquake, and a ship-load o' people go down at sea; but if the mouse came out and the cat got it, she would amuse herself with it a while, eat it and then curl up before the fire and purr about what a fine day it had been, all because she had got what she had been lookin' for; and the's a lot in this.

Now, when I came to think it over, I had n't heard the Friar express himself very free on women. I had heard him say to allus treat 'em kind an' square, the good ones and the bad; but when ya come to ponder over this, it was n't no-wise definite. Still I could n't believe ill of him; so I took a vacation an' started to hunt him up.

The feller who had told me did n't know much about it, but the feller who had told him knew it all. When I found this feller, he was in the same fix; and he sent me along to the one who had told him. They were all a lot alike in not knowin' it all; but I finally found out who the girl was.

She was a girl named Kit Murray, and she allus had been a lively young thing with a purty face, an' could ride an' shoot like a man. She had took part in a couple o' frontier-day exhibitions, and it had turned her head, and she had gone out with a show. When she had come back, she had put on more airs 'n ever, and naturally the boys were some wild about her — though I had n't seen her myself.

News o' this kind travels fast, and I heard buzzin' about it everywhere; but it was just like all other scandal. Most

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people, when they gossip, believe an' tell the story which comes closest to what they 'd 'a' done if they 'd had the same chance; and what I figured out to be true was, that Olaf the Swede and another Cross-brander by the name o' Bud Fisher had scrapped about the girl, Olaf near killin' the kid and the girl runnin' off to the Friar. Now, all the good deeds 'at the Friar had done had n't caused much talk; but this news spread like wild-fire; and a lot o' those he had helped the most turned again' him and said they wished they could find out where he was hidin'.

I took it just the other way; I knew the Friar purty well, and what I feared most was, that he was n't hidin' at all, and that Olaf would find him before I could give him warnin'. It was two weeks before I found the Friar; but once I came upon Olaf, face to face, and we eyed each other purty close. This was the first time I ever noticed his eyes. They were the queerest eyes I ever saw, a sort of blue; but a deeper blue, a bluer blue 'n anything I had ever seen outside a flower. The's a flower on the benches in June just the color of his eyes, a soft, velvety flower; but Olaf's eyes were n't soft and velvety the day we met, and they gave me a queer, creepy feelin'. I hope I did n't show it any; but I did feel relieved after I 'd passed him.

Finally I found the Friar, just as I might have expected — by the sound of his voice. I had got clear over into the Basin and was crossin' through Carter Pass when I heard his voice above me, singin' one of his marchin' songs. I was mightily rejoiced to find him; but I had that all out of my face by the time I had wound around up to him. He was totin' a log on his shoulder, and struttin' along as jaunty as though the whole earth was simply his backyard.

"Here," I growls to him, indignant, "what do you mean

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by makin' such a noise? Have n't you got a grain o' gumption!"

He looked up at me with the surprise stickin' out from under his grin. "Well, well, well!" sez he. "Who are you — the special officer for the prevention of noise?"

"I ain't no special officer of anything," I answers; "but the's people lookin' for you, and you ought to have sense enough to keep quiet."

"And I 'm lookin' for people," sez he, grinnin' like a boy; "and the best way to find 'em is by makin' a noise. The' ain't any rules again' walkin' on the grass up here, is there?"

"Olaf the Swede is after you on account o' the gal," I blunted; "and he ain't no bluffer. He intends to do away with you for good and all; and you 'd better be makin' your plans."

"Goin' to do away with me for good an' all," he repeats, smilin'. "Well, Olaf the Swede is a gross materialist. The worst he can do will be to tear off my wrapper and leave me free to find out a lot of things I 'm deeply interested in. Why, Happy, you 're all worked up! You 've lost your philosophy, you 've become a frettish old woman. What you need is a right good scare to straighten you up again. This Olaf the Swede is part of Ty Jones's outfit, is n't he?"

"He is," I replied, shakin' my head in warnin', "and the whole gang 'll back him up in this."

"Good!" sez the Friar, smackin' his hand. "I 've wanted an openin' wedge into that outfit ever since I came out here. Of a truth, the Lord doth move in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform."

"Well, he certainly will have to perform some mysterious

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wonders to get you out of this scrape," I said. I was put out at the way he took it.

"Don't be irreverent, Happy," sez he, the joy-lights dancin' in his eyes. "We are all merely instruments, and why should an instrument take it upon itself to question the way it is used. Where is this Olaf?"

"I met him yesterday; and for all I know, he 's been follow in' me."

"Fine, fine!" sez the Friar. "Now, you go on back to the Diamond Dot, and I 'll go back over your trail and save Olaf as much bother as possible."

"I 'm goin' along with you," I sez.

"No," sez he.

"Yes," sez I.

"It 'll make folks think 'at I 'm afraid for my skin, and have you along for protection," sez he, gettin' earnest.

"If you had good judgment, you would be afraid for your skin," sez I. "I tell you that Olaf is after your blood. He 's one o' the worst; he kills with his bare hands when he gets the chance."

"Fine, fine!" sez the Friar again, his eyes glowin' joyous. "I 'd have a right to defend myself with my hands, Happy. I would have a right to do this, for the sake of Olaf, you see — to prevent him from risking his own soul by committin' murder. This is a great chance for me, Happy; now, please, please, go on back like a good fellow."

I was secretly tickled at the argument the Friar had put up for a chance at physical warfare — and a barehand fight between him and Olaf would have been worth goin' a long way to see — but I was as obstinate as either of 'em; so I just said 'at I was goin' along.

"Well, you 're not goin' with me," sez the Friar, as pouty

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as a schoolboy. "I 'll not speak to ya, and I 'll not have a thing to do with ya"; and he threw down his log and glared at me.

I took a certain amount o' pride because the Friar lived up to his own standards; but I also found a certain deep-rooted amusement in havin' him slip out from under 'em for a spell and display a human disposition which was purty much kindred to my own. "What do you purpose doin' with that club, Friar?" I asked, pointin' to the log he had flung down.

He pulled in his glare and looked to be a little discomposed. "Why I — I 'm livin' in a cave I got back there."

"Are you dead set again' havin' a little company?" sez I, slow an' insinuatin', "or are ya livin' alone?"

First off, he was inclined to be resentful, then he grinned, shouldered his log again, and said: "Come and see."

I follered him back into the hills until we came to a little park in which his ponies were grazin', and then I hobbled mine, cached my gear alongside his, and trailed after him again. His path turned a crag and then skirted along the edge of a cliff as straight up and down as the real truth. The path kept gettin' narrower, until every time the Friar turned a corner ahead of me, I expected to see him walkin' off in the air with the log still on his shoulder.

Presently I turned a corner around which he had disappeared, and there was n't a soul in sight. The ledge still led along the cliff; but it had got thinner than a lawyer's excuse, and a worm could n't have walked along it without hangin' on. While I stood there puzzlin' about it, a hand reached out o' the side of the cliff, and the Friar's voice said mockingly: "Take my hand, little one; and then shut your eyes for fear you might get dizzy."

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Then I saw a jag of rock stickin' out just above my head, I grabbed it with my left hand, and swung around into what was the mouth of a cave. It was nothin' but a crack about eighteen inches wide, and the far side was sunk in enough to keep it hid from where I was standin'. The Friar was standin' a few feet back in the entrance with his log leanin' up again' the side. "I know not what other animals may have sought shelter here," he said, "but for the past three years this has been my castle, and, Happy Hawkins," — here the Friar bowed low — "obstinate and unreasonable as you are, I offer you a hearty welcome."

The Friar said this in fun, but the' was an undertone to it which tightened the laces around my heart consid'able. Well, that cave was a sure enough surprise; he had three or four pelts and a couple of Injun blankets on the floor, he had a couple o' barrels fixed to catch snow water, he had some cookin' tools; and books! Say, he must have had as many as a hundred books, all of 'em hard-shells, and lookin' so edicated an' officious that I had to take off my hat before I had nerve enough to begin readin' the titles.

After I 'd taken everything in, I sat down in an easy chair he 'd made out o' saplin's and rawhide, and looked all about; but I could n't see any signs of their bein' any other rooms to this cave; and then I jumped square for the mark, and sez: "Friar, the's a lot o' talk about you havin' run off with Kit Murray. Now I want the straight of it."

His face went grave and a little hurt. "It 's strange," he said after a time, "how hard it is for a man to believe in his own guilt, and how easy for him to believe in the guilt of his neighbor. Have you had any dinner?"

"Yes," sez I. "I did n't know just where I was headin';

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so I et three different times this mornin' to make sure of havin' enough to run on in case of emergency."

"It 's a fine thing to be an outdoor animal," sez the Friar, smilin'. "Well then, I 've made up my mind to take you to see Kit Murray."

He did n't waste any time askin' me not to talk about what was other folks' affairs; he just went to the door, grabbed the jag of rock, swung around to the ledge, and I follered after.

We saddled up, rode down a windin' path 'at I 'd never heard of before, and then rode up again until we came to a little clump o' swamp shrubbery, backed up again' the north face o' Mount Mizner. We follered a twisty path through this and finally came out on an open space in which stood a fair-sized cabin. He whistled a five-note call, and the door was opened by an old woman who was a stranger to me. "Mother Shipley, this is Happy Hawkins," sez he. "How 's Kit?"

The old woman gave me a gimlet look, and then her sharp features expanded to a smile, and she bobbed her head. "Kit 's gettin' hard to manage," sez she.

We went into the cabin, and found Kit with a bandage around her ankle, sittin' in a rockin' chair, and lookin' patiently disgusted. She was a fine-lookin' girl, with a fair streak of boy in her, and she had never had enough practice at bein' an invalid to shine at it. Her face lit up at the Friar; but her gaze was mighty inquirin' when she turned it at me.

"You know Happy Hawkins, don't ya?" sez the Friar. She nodded her head, and he went on. "Well, he 's one o' the fellers you can trust, if you trust him entire; but he 's got such a bump of curiosity that if you don't tell it all to him in the first place, he can't do no other work until he

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finds it out on his own hook. He 's my friend, and he 'll be your friend; so I want you to tell him just how things are, and then he 'll be under obligations to do whatever we want him to."

So Kit cut loose and told me her story. Her father, ol' Jim Murray, had got crippled up about ten years before, and since then had become a professional homesteader, nosin' out good places, an' then sellin' out to the big cattle outfits. He also made it his business to find ways to drive off genuwine homesteaders; and in addition to this he was a home tyrant and hard to live with. He allus had plenty o' money, but was generally dead broke when it came to pleasant words an' smiles — which was why Kit had gone off with the show.

While she was away, she had married a low-grade cuss, who had misused her beyond endurance; so when he had skipped with another woman, she had come back to the old man. She did n't want folks 'at knew her to find out how bad hit she 'd been; so she had tried to bluff it out; but the young fellers kept fallin' in love with her and wantin' to marry her. She had n't meant no harm; but she had played one again' the other, hopin' they 'd soon have their feelin's hurt and let her alone. This was a fool notion, but she had been honest in it.

Bud Fisher, the Texas kid in the Ty Jones outfit, had got daffy about her; and then one night at a dance she had shot some smiles into the eyes of Olaf the Swede. She said he was such a glum-lookin' cuss she had no idee he would take it serious; but he had stood lookin' into her eyes with his queer blue ones, until she had felt sort o' fainty; and from that on, he had declared war on all who glanced at her.

Bud Fisher thought it a fine joke for Olaf to fall in love,

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and he had teased him to the limit. This made a bad condition, and all through the spring round-up, each had done as much dirt as possible to the other; but Ty was mighty strict about his men fightin' each other; so they had n't come to a clash.

Finally the kid brags that he is goin' to elope with Kit; and then Olaf kicks off his hobbles an' starts to stampede. The kid was wise enough to vamoose; so Olaf rides down to ol' man Murray's, and reads the riot act to him. Kit was hidin' in the back room and heard it all. He told the old man that he would slaughter any one who eloped with Kit or who had a hand in it; and then he had gone back to hunt the kid again.

The ol' man turned in and gave Kit a complete harrowin' as soon as Olaf had left and she had told him pointedly that she 'd eat dirt before she 'd eat his food again; so she saddled her pony and started to ride without knowin' where. Her pony had slipped on Carter Pass and she had sprained her ankle so bad she could n't stand. Just at this junction, the Friar had come along, and had put her up on his horse and held her on with one arm about her, because the pain in her ankle made her head light. On the way they came smack up again' the kid, and he gave 'em a grin, and gone on without askin' questions.

He went straight to Olaf, and told him that Kit had eloped with the Friar. The Friar had brought her up to Shipley's, they havin' been friends of his in Colorado. They had a daughter livin' up in Billings, Montana; and as soon as her ankle could stand it, Kit was goin' up to live with the daughter, she havin' three little children and a railroad husband who was away from home more 'n half the time.

This was the whole o' the story; but you can easy see

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what a fine prospect it made for gossip, and also what a fine time a young imp like Bud Fisher could have with a sober feller like Olaf. Olaf would n't have just grounds for makin' away with Bud for doin' nothin' except grin, so long as the Friar remained alive with the girl in his keepin'. It was a neat little mess; and from what we found out afterwards, the kid was as irritatin' as a half-swallered cockle-burr.

Big, silent fellers like Olaf are just like big, new boilers. A little leaky boiler fizzes away all the time, but when it comes to explode, it has n't anything on hand to explode with; while a big, tight boiler, when it does go off, generally musses up the landscape consid'able; and when Olaf started to stampede he made more noise in a week 'n Bud Fisher had in his whole life.

When Kit had finished tellin' me the story, I shook hands with her, and said that while she had n't used the best judgment the' was, she had probably used the best she had; and that it was more the men's fault than hers, so she could count on me as far as I could travel. Then I went outside while the Friar and ol' Mother Shipley fixed up her ankle.

They all seemed pleased about the way it was healin', and after it was tied up, Kit stood on it and even took a few steps. It twisted her face a time or two at first; but after she 'd gone across the room and back a few times, she said it felt better 'n it had for years. This made us all laugh, 'cause fact was, she had n't been housed in near up to the average of a sprained ankle. The Friar allowed 'at she 'd be fit to travel day after the next; so it was planned to start in the evenin', and for both of us to go with her. Then we had an early supper an' started home.

On the way, I complained about the foolish way in which Kit had acted, for the sole purpose of drawin' the Friar out

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and gettin' his views on women. Nearly always when I got him started, I was able to pick up some little sayin' which furnished me with more thought-food than his blocked-out sermons did.

"Of course Kit was foolish," he admitted; "but what show has she ever had? Her father never was fit to bring her up; and he did n't even do the best he could. A woman has more vital strength than a man, because the future of the race depends on her; but she also has more emotions, so 'at the wear an' tear is greater. Man, on the other hand, has more muscle 'n woman, and more brutality. Foolin' man has been the best way a woman had to fight for a good many centuries; and this was the way poor Kit tried to fight. The plain, simple truth generally works best; but it takes wisdom to see this, and wisdom is seldom anything more than the dregs o' folly. The' was no one to teach Kit wisdom; so she has had to strain off her own folly; but she is a fine, brave girl, and I think she will profit by experience."

Now this was a new thought to me, about wisdom bein' nothin' but the dregs o' folly; but it 's a good tough thought, and I 've had a heap o' chewin' on it since then; so I feel repaid in havin' took sides again' Kit and lurin' the Friar into heavin' it at me.

It was dark when we reached his twistin' path along the ledge, and I stepped as cautious as a glow-worm in a powder-mill; but as soon as we had our pipes an' the fire goin', I would n't have swapped seats with the fattest king in the universe.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TESTING THE FRIAR'S NERVE

As soon as we had eaten breakfast next mornin', the Friar sez: "You, bein' one o' the earth animals, have never had much chance to see a view. Yesterday your curiosity was itchin' so 'at I doubt if you could have told a mountain peak from a Mexican hat; but now that you have temporarily suppressed your thirst for gossip, had a good sleep, and a better breakfast, drag yourself out to the front porch and take a bird's-eye view of the world."

Well, it was worth it, it certainly was worth it! What he called the front porch, was the ledge after it had flipped itself around the jutting; and when a feller stood on it, he felt plenty enough like a bird to make it interestin'. The Big Horns ran across the top o' the picture about a hundred an' forty miles to the north, and gettin' all blended in with the clouds. On the other two sides were different members of the Shoshone family, most o' which I knew by sight from any angle; and down below was miles an' miles of country spread out like a map, but more highly colored.

"Friar," I sez, "you 're a wealthy man."

This tickled him a lot, 'cause he was as proud o' that view as if he 'd painted it. "I am, Happy," he said, "and I have yielded to a wealthy man's temptations. Any one who comes here will be welcome; but I own up, I have kept this place a secret to have it all to myself."

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"A man like you needs some quiet place to consider in," sez I.

"Get thee behind me, Satan, get thee behind me," cried the Friar. "I have been on far too friendly terms with that excuse for many a long month. But I do enjoy this place; so I am going to let you help me lay in my winter's supply of wood, and then make you a joint member in full standing."

We packed wood along that spider thread of a path all morning; and finally I got so it did n't phaze me any more 'n it did him. He sang at his work most of the time, and I joined in with him whenever I felt so moved, though it did strike me 'at this was a funny way to keep a place secret; and my idee is that he sang to ease his conscience by showin' it that he was n't sneakin' about his treasure.

I remember him mighty plain as he walked before me on the ledge, totin' a big log on his shoulder, and singin' the one 'at begins, "Hark, my soul! It is the Lord!" This was one he fair used to raise himself in, and it seemed as if we two were climbin' right up on the air, plumb into the sky. When he 'd let himself out this way, he 'd fill me so full of a holy kind of devilment, that it would 'a' given me joy to have leaped off the cliff with him, and take chances on goin' up or down.

We had about filled his wood place, and were goin' back after the last load when just as he swung around a corner, I saw his hand go up as though warnin' me to stop; and I froze in my tracks. He had n't been singin' this trip, for a wonder; but the next moment I heard a sound which purt nigh jarred me off. It was a low, deep growl which I instantly recognized as belongin' to Olaf the Swede. Olaf did n't talk with much brogue, though when he got excited he had his own fashion for hitchin' words together.

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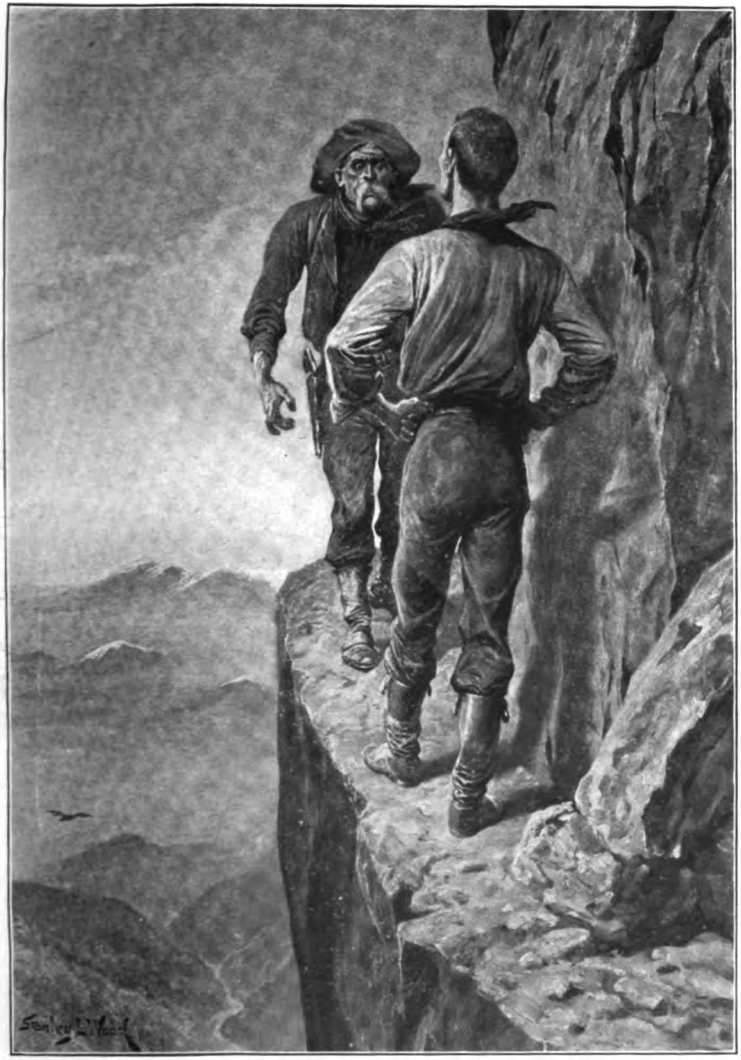

"I intend to kill you," said Olaf, as calm as though talkin' about a sick sheep

"It would be a foolish waste of time," replied the Friar, as if he was advisin' a ten-year-old boy not to fish when the Blue Bull was high and muddy. "It wouldn't do any good, and I shall not allow it"

See page 173

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"Where is the girl?" he asked with quiet fierceness, and for a space I was sorry my parents had n't been eagles. There was n't room to fight out on that ledge, the Friar did n't have a gun on, I could n't possibly shoot around him; and Olaf was seven parts demon when he laid back his ears and started to kick.

"Where she cannot be bothered," sez the Friar, full as quiet but without any fierceness. The' was a little bush about eight feet up, and I felt sure it would hide me, so I stuck my fingers in the side o' the cliff and climbed up; but the' was no way for me to get out to the bush, and I had to drop back to the ledge and stand there with the sweat tricklin' down between my shoulders until I felt like yellin'.

"I intend to kill you," said Olaf, as calm as though talkin' about a sick sheep.

"It would be a foolish waste of time," replied the Friar, as if he was advisin' a ten-year-old boy not to fish when the Blue Bull was high and muddy. "It would n't do any good, and I shall not allow it."

I got out my gun, and made ready to do whatever the angels suggested; but for some time the' was silence, and durin' this time I was keyed up so tight my muscles began to ache. I knew they were lookin' into each other's eyes, and I 'd have given a finger off each hand to see how the Friar's steady gray eyes handled those queer blue ones of Olaf.

"Is she all right?" asked Olaf, and all the threat had left his voice, and it had just a glint o' pleadin' in it. I would n't have been one bit more surprised to have seen a prairie-dog come flyin' up the gorge, blowin' a cornet with his nose.

"She has sprained her ankle; but aside from this has no physical ill," sez the Friar. "You men have caused her a lot of worry, and her soul is sick; but her body is well."

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After another silence, Olaf said slowly: "Yes, yes; I can tell by the light that you speak true. What do you intend to do with her?"

"I intend to cure her," sez the Friar. "I intend to help and strengthen her; and I want you to help her, too. Olaf, she has had a lot of trouble, and her wild gaiety is only a veil to hide the wounds in her heart. I want you to help her."

"I know, I know she is honest," said Olaf, and blamed if his voice did n't sound like a new boy talkin' to the boss; "but she made me love her. Yes, I do love her. I must marry her. Yes, this is so."

"She cannot marry you, or any one else, now," sez the Friar, kindly. "This is why she has gone from one man to another — to disgust them all and make them leave her alone."

"That is a damn devil of a way," cried Olaf in anger. "Why should she go to dances, and out ridin', and so on, if she wants men to leave her alone?"

"She was foolish, she knows that now; but her father is not the right sort of a man, and her home was not pleasant," said the Friar.

"I told him I kill him, if she marry any one but me," said Olaf. "I know he is not honest; but he is afraid of me, and he will not bother her now. I go to see him again purty soon, and tell him some more. Won't you tell me where she is?"

"I want to be your friend, Olaf," said the Friar gently. "I tell you honest that she cannot marry now. When I see her again, I shall tell her of meetin' you, and what you have said. I have no desire except to do the best for all of you, and if you love her truly, all you will want will be to do that which is best for her."

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The Friar paused, and I pulled my ear clear to the edge o' the rock, so as not to miss a word. "Olaf," he went on in a low, sorrowful voice, "the love of a man for a woman is a wonderful thing, a terrible thing, a soul-testing thing. Don't let your love become common for men to talk over. In believing what men have told you of me you have insulted her, by admitting that such a thing is possible. Go back to your work, kill no man for what he says of her; but keep her pure in your own heart, and this will be the best way to keep her pure before the world. Silence the gossips by living above them; and if it becomes necessary for you to take your own love by the throat, then do it, and do it for love of her. I shall do all I can to make her worthy of you."

You should have heard the Friar's voice when he was sayin' this. I stood on the little ledge, just breathin' enough to keep my lungs ventilated, and lookin' out across the landscape — mountains on all sides of me, and down below the broken ground and the benches, with the green strips along the cricks lookin' like lazy snakes in the hot sunshine. I could n't see a livin' creature, I felt like the last man on earth; and that deep, musical voice seemed comin' to me from somewhere out beyond the limits of life. I did n't have any more fear now: the' was n't anything in the shape of a human who could have done violence to the Friar after hearin' him say the words I 'd just heard; so I put up my gun, and listened again.

"Can't ya tell me why she can't marry me?" asked Olaf, and the' was a tremble in his voice, almost as though it flowed up from a sob.

"I think I can trust you to keep her secret," sez the Friar. "She is married already. The man was a beast and deserted her; but he is still alive, and she cannot marry again."

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I heard Olaf make a queer, animal sound with his breath, and then he said: "Yes, you speak true — I can tell by the light; but she loves me — I can tell that also by the light. Will you tell me when she can marry?"

"I will," sez the Friar, and his voice was a pledge. "There 's my hand on it."

They brought their hands together with a smack I could hear, and then Olaf turned on the narrow ledge, with the Friar holdin' him on, an' started off. The Friar went along with him, and I sneaked after, keepin' a turn between us. Olaf mounted his hoss and rode away without lookin' back, which, as a matter o' fact, was his way o' doin' things; and when he was out o' sight, I joined the Friar.

The' was still a look of sadness in the Friar's face; but back of it, and shinin' through it, was a quiet satisfaction. He was full o' the scene he had just gone through; and presently he turned an' said: "That was a glorious victory he gained over himself, Happy. That man has a good heart, and who knows but what he will yet be the means of bringin' me an' Tyrrel Jones together."

"What do you reckon he meant by the light tellin' him that you were an honest man?" I asked. This was the most curious part of the whole thing to me.

"How can I tell," he sez. "Life is so crowded with wonders that I have quit wonderin' about 'em; but I always feel a thrill when I see the stubborn spirit of a strong man melt and run into the mold the Master has prepared for it."

"I 'll own it was about the weirdest thing I ever saw," sez I; "but I 'm willin' to bet that whatever else Olaf's spirit has molded itself into, it 's not a doormat with 'welcome' wrote on it; as the first feller 'at fools with that girl is likely to find out."

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"Never doubt the power of the Lord, Happy," sez he. "The hand that piled up these hills can easy shape even so stubborn a thing as the human will."

"Yes," I agreed; "but it generally takes just about the same length of time to do it, and a man don't usually last that long."

"Time!" sez he; "what do you know about time? It may have taken ages to form these hills; and then again, it may have been done in the twinklin' of an eye. From the way the streaks tilt up, I 'm inclined to think it was done sudden."

I looked at the lines along the faces o' the hills, and I was inclined to believe it, too; so I dropped that subject, and we sat down close together and looked off down the trail where Olaf had vanished.

We sat in silence a long time, me thinkin' o' what sort of a light Olaf had seen to make him know 'at the Friar was honest; and of the way the Friar's voice had gone through me when he had talked of love.

This was a new idee to me, and one o' the biggest I had ever tried to grapple with. Before this, my notion o' love was, for a man to get the girl any way he could; and it took me some time to see the grandness of a man takin' his own love by the throat for love of a woman. I knew 'at the Friar had done this himself; but it never was clear to me until I heard the heartache moanin' through his voice as he laid out this law for Olaf, and Olaf bowed his stiff neck and accepted it.

I 'm purty sure that if I 'd 'a' known that day, that a few years later I would have to take my own love by the throat for the sake of little Barbie, I would n't 'a' had the nerve to go on playin' the game — but this is life. We pick up a

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stone here, and another there, and build them into our wall until the flood comes; and then if the wall is n't high enough to turn back the flood, all the sting and bitterness comes from knowin' that we have n't made use of all the stones which came rollin' down to our feet.

That night we had an uncommon fine fire in the cave. I used to enjoy these evenin' fires with the Friar, as much as a dog likes to have his ears pulled by the hand he loves best. He would tell me tales of all the ages 'at man has lived on the face of the whole earth, and I 'd sit and smoke my pipe, and make up what I 'd 'a' done, myself, if I 'd been one o' these big fellers. These chummy little fire-talks used to broaden me out and make me feel related to the whole human race, and it was then 'at I came to know the Friar best — though the' ain't no way to put this into a story.

Along about nine o'clock the Friar began to lecture me again' the use o' violence, pointin' out that war nor gun-fightin' nor any other sort o' violence had ever done any good; and endin' up with the way he had handled Olaf as illustratin' how much better effects spiritual methods had.

"Humph," sez I, "so you 're tryin' to put that over as an ordinary case, are ya? Did you ever before see such eyes in a man's head as what Olaf has?"

"Now that you mention it," sez he, "I did notice they were peculiar."

"I ruhly believe you 're right," sez I, sarcastic. "When he said he saw light he was n't speakin' in parables. He can see things 'at you nor I can't see — though I doubt if he understands 'em himself."

"Still, violence would have spoiled everything," persisted

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the Friar, who was as human as a raw bronco when you tried to make him back up.

"Now, don't forget anything," sez I. "It was n't my face 'at lit up when I said 'at he did his killin' with bare hands; nor it was n't me who gloated over this as furnishin' an excuse to use my bare hands in defendin' myself."

"Oh, Happy, Happy," sez he, with one o' the bursts 'at made ya willin' to go through fire and water for him. "I 'm the entire human race: there is n't a single sin or weakness which has n't betrayed me at one time or another, and yet the wicked pride of me persists in stickin' up its head an' crowin' every time I take my eyes off it."

"Well, I like your pride full as well as any other part o' ya," sez I; "and before you wrangle it into its corral again, I want to say 'at no other man in the world could 'a' told Olaf what you told him this mornin', and lived to talk it over around this fire to-night — unless, he had used the best and the quickest brand o' violence the' is, in the meantime."

"Now, that you have succeeded in flatterin' both of us, we 'll go to sleep," sez the Friar, and the' was a deep twinkle in his eyes which allus rejoiced me to call up.

Next night soon after dark, we started out with Kit Murray. She rode like a man and could tick out her fifty or sixty a day right along, without worryin' her pony. As soon as she was safe located in Billings, I turned back to the Dot, while the Friar rounded up some stray sheep he had near the border, and as far as I can recall we did n't meet again all that summer.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

OLAF'S theories concernin' violence did n't harmonize complete with the Friar's; but his method for discouragin' scandal was thorough to a degree. He silenced the gossipers all right, though so far as I heard, most of 'em recovered; and the outcome was 'at the Friar stood higher after the scandal 'n he had before.

The Cross brand outfit was a good deal like a pack o' dogs: they each sought Ty Jones's favor, and they were all jealous of each other. Olaf stood high on account of his mysterious insight; so Badger-face, the foreman, backed up Bud Fisher to devil Olaf as far as possible without givin' Olaf what Ty would judge a fit excuse for unscrewin' the kid's neck; and from the talk I heard, their outfit trotted along as smooth an' friendly as seven he bears hitched to a freight wagon; but our trails did n't cross frequent, so it was all hearsay.

The winter before had been so fierce 'at a lot o' small outfits could n't winter through their stock. Towards spring, ol' Cast Steel had bought in the Half Moon brand for a hundred an' fifty dollars; and that summer me an' Spider Kelley put in our spare time huntin' strays. Spider had come back, flat broke and full o' repentance; so after I 'd stood him on his head in a buffalo-wallow full o' mud, I forgave him free and frank, and this summer we rode together most o' the time.

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Ol' Cast Steel was as lucky as a hump-back cat, and this summer the grass was fatter 'n ever I 'd seen it. We rounded up over five hundred head o' ponies, and over sixty cows, which was just like bein' caught out in a gold storm without your slicker on; so we did n't sympathize any with the old man, but prospected around for pleasure whenever we felt like it.

One afternoon after the fall round-up, me an' Spider found ourselves in a mighty rough bit o' country on the north slope o' the Wind River range. We had been herdin' six or eight Half Moon ponies before us for several days, devilin' a parcel of Injuns into thinkin' 'at we was out tradin'; but we had got weary o' this, an' were just foolin' around and wishin' 'at somethin' would turn up to amuse us.

"Aw, let 's go on back home," sez Spider, not knowin' he was speakin' wisdom. "I 'd sooner work at work than work at huntin' up somethin' to amuse myself with."

"Well," I sez, "we 'll finish out this afternoon, an' then if nothin' turns up, we 'll go back, draw our pay an' go into Boggs."

We saw our ponies start around a butte ahead of us an' stop to examine somethin'. We followed 'em around the butte, and there below us on a little level, was a bunch of men — seven of 'em. We drew up an' gave 'em a look-over.

"What do you make out?" sez I.

"Olaf the Swede with a rope around his neck, an' Badger-face Flannigan holdin' the other end o' the rope," sez Spider. "What do you reckon they 're goin' to do to him?"

"Comb his hair, or fit a new sun-bonnet on him," sez I, sarcastic. "What else do they put a man's neck in a noose for? Let 's go down an' see what happens."

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"A feller's not sure of a welcome at such times," sez Spider.

"No," I agreed; "but I want to see Olaf's eyes again, and this may be my last chance."

"It may be your last chance to see anything," sez Spider. "The best thing we can do is just to back-track. We interrupted 'em once before; and I don't want 'em to get the idee that we spend all our time doggin' their footsteps for a chance to spoil their fun. This ain't any of our business."

"We won't spoil their fun," sez I. "If they get suspicious, we can take a hand in it, an' that will fix it all right. Olaf ain't nothin' to us; and I don't intend to risk my fat for him, just 'cause he's got curious eyes."

"No, I'm not goin'," sez Spider.

I looked across at the group again, an' there comin' up the trail behind 'em was Friar Tuck, ridin' a round little pinto, an' leadin' a big bay.

"Well, you just stay here, an' be damned to you," sez I to Spider. "I'm goin' on down." So me an' Spider rode down together, an' arrived at just the same time as the Friar did.

Badger-face looked first at us, an' then at the Friar. "What the hell do you fellers want this time?" he sez to us in welcome.

"We just happened along," sez I. "What's goin' on?"

"You're goin' on yourselves, first thing," sez Badger-face. "That's what's goin' on."

"I guess 'at you ain't got neither deeds nor lease to this land," sez I. "We haven't any intention of interferin' with you; but we don't intend to be sent where we don't want to go. We've got business here, huntin' up stray hosses, an' I reckon we'll just stick around."

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"You got business here, too, I suppose?" sez Badger-face, turnin' to the Friar.

"Yes," sez the Friar calmly. "I came here entirely by accident; but now it is my business to inquire into why you have a rope about this man's neck. You recall havin' put me into a similar perdicament, Mr. Flannigan."

"Yes, an' the only thing I regret is, that I was interrupted," growls Badger-face. "But this time, the' ain't any chance to change the programme, so you might just as well poke on into some one else's affairs."

"What 's the matter, Olaf?" asked the Friar.

Before Olaf could reply, Badger-face gave a jerk on the rope. "You shut up," sez he.

"Surely you will give the man a chance to speak," cried the Friar, indignant.

"It won't do him no good to speak," sez Badger-face. "He 's committed a murder, but of course he denies it. Now, get out o' here, all three of ya."

"Listen," sez the Friar, as steady an' strong as the sweep of a deep river, "I care more for justice 'n I do for law. I know that hangin' a man has never done any good; but it is usually regarded as a legal form of punishment, and the prejudice in its favor is still too strong for one man to overcome. If you convince me that this man would be hung by a court, why, I shall never say a word about it; but if you do not convince me, I shall stir up all the trouble I can. I have quite a number of friends, Mr. Flannigan."

Badger-face studied over this a moment; and he saw it had sense. "All right," sez he, "we 'll try him fair an' square; and then you three will have to help string him, an' I guess that 'll keep your mouths shut."

"Tell your story, Olaf," sez the Friar.

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"Well," sez Olaf, "we came up short on the round-up, an' the old man raised Cain about it, an' sent us out to hunt for strays. Badger-face split us into pairs, an' made me an' Bud Fisher work together. We saw some cows up on a ledge where we could n't ride to; so we left the hosses below, an' climbed to see if they had our brand. If they had, we intended to ride around and get 'em. If not it would save half a day. Bud Fisher had a rifle along, hopin' to get a mountain sheep, an' he insisted on takin' it with him. He climbed up on a ledge, an' I passed up the rifle to him. It was a long stretch, an' I passed it muzzle first. The hammer caught on a point of rock, an' shot him through the stomach. I did n't bear him any ill will any more — I ran down to the hosses, an' brought up the saddle-blankets an' the slickers, an' made him as comfortable as I could. Then I hunted up Badger-face an' told him. When we got back he was dead. This is the truth."

"I think it is," sez the Friar.

"Aw rot!" sez Badger-face. "Come on, now, an' finish it. Every one knows how they hated each other; and it 's plain enough that when the Swede here got the chance, he just put Bud out o' the way, an' Bud was one o' the finest boys the' ever was in the world — always full o' fun an' frolic; while Olaf has allus been sour an' gloomy."

Most men are as sappy as green grain, an' they bow which-ever way the wind blows. The Cross brand punchers all looked extremely sad when Badger-face spoke o' what a royal good feller Bud Fisher had been, an' when he stopped, they all glared at Olaf as friendly as wolves, especially a skinny feller by the name of Dixon, who had the neck and disposition of a snake.

"If you thought 'at Olaf an' Fisher hated each other,

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why did you make 'em work together?" asked the Friar; and the Cross brand punchers pricked up their ears an' looked pointedly at Badger-face.

"I thought they had made it up," sez Badger-face, surprised into takin' the defensive.

"I have noticed that you are likely to jump hasty at conclusions," sez the Friar, speakin' with tantalizin' slowness. He was a fisher of men, all right, the Friar was; and just then he was fishin' for those Cross brand punchers. "Did Bud speak before he died, Olaf?" he asked impartially.

Olaf hung his head: "All he said was, that she had n't never cared for him, an' that he did n't know one thing again' her," said Olaf.

"Aw, what 's the use o' stringin' it out," sez Badger-face. "Let 's hang him and have it over with."

"Hanging a fellow-bein' is a serious matter, Mr. Flannigan," sez the Friar. "I am a party to this now, and shall have to assume my share of the responsibility. I shall never consent to swingin' a man on such evidence as this. Let us go and examine the spot. The hammer may have left a scratch, or something. If you convince me that Olaf committed the murder, I pledge to assist in hangin' him. That 's certainly fair, men," he sez to the Cross-branders, an' they nodded their heads that it was.

So we clumb up to the spot where Olaf claimed to have handed the gun; but the' was n't any scratch on the rock. "Did he fall from the ledge when he was shot?" asked the Friar.

"No," sez one o' the punchers. "He fell on the edge an' hung on."

"Did the bullet go clean through him?" asked the Friar.

"Yes, it went clear through," sez the feller.

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"Point with your finger just where it went in, an' just where it came out," sez the Friar.

The feller pointed with one finger in front, an' one behind. The Friar took a rope an' had me hold it behind the feller at just the level of that finger an' then he made Spider stretch the rope so that it passed on a line with the finger in front. The whole crowd was interested by this time. "Now, then," sez the Friar, "where could Olaf have stood to shoot such a line as that. He could not have shot while he was climbin' up, nor he could n't have reached high enough while standin' below."

"He could, too," sez Badger-face, "for Bud would have been leanin' over, reachin' for the gun."

"If he had been shot while he was reachin' over, he would have fallen from the ledge," flashed the Friar.

"Maybe he did," snapped Badger-face, just as quick. "Olaf here is as strong as a horse, an' maybe he put him back on the ledge. He had blood on his hands an' you can still see it on his shirt. A man don't bleed much when shot in the belly."

Olaf's queer blue eyes turned from one to the other, but his face did n't change expression much. He had about give up hope in the first place, an' his face had the look of a hoss, after he 's been throwed four or five times an' just keels over on his side an' sez to himself: "Well, they 've put the kibosh on me, an' I don't intend to make a fool of myself any more by tryin' to break loose." The rest of us was more excited about it than Olaf was himself.

"Which one of us is the nearest size to Bud Fisher?" asked the Friar.

They all agreed that Spider Kelley was; so the Friar had him coon up on the ledge. Then he had Olaf take the empty

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rifle just as he had held it when he passed it up; but made him give it to Badger-face himself to pass up. Badger-face passed it up, Spider Kelley reached for it, took it, and started to straighten up — The hammer caught on the precise knob that Olaf had said it had, an' snapped hard enough to set off a catridge. "There," sez the Friar, sweepin' his hands wide. We could all see that the bullet would 'a' gone through just where it did go.

"Hand back the rifle, an' I 'll show ya how he passed it up," said Badger-face. Spider passed it down, an' we all watched intent. It had become like a real court o' law; we had forgot what the case was about, we was so interested in seein' the scrap the lawyers were puttin' up.

Badger-face cocked the rifle so slick we did n't see him, called out to Spider to catch it, an' tossed it up to him. It came just short o' Spider's hand; and without thinkin' o' what he was doin', Spider reached for the gun. This brought him squattin' just the time the gun dropped back into Badger's hands, and quick as a wink, he pulled the trigger — and hanged if that bullet would n't have traveled through the same hole the first one had made.

I never saw circumstantial evidence give such a work-out before. If we had all been fair-minded, it would have puzzled us; but as it was, we sided accordin' to our prejudices; an' the Cross brand fellers chose Badger-face to Olaf, Badger-face bein' foreman. The Friar saw he was stumped.

"Are there any marks up there?" he asked of Spider.

"There 's some blood streaks on a stone," sez Spider.

"Did you notice 'em?" asked the Friar of Badger-face.

"Yes," sez he; "but they don't mean nothin'."

"Let 's go up an' look at 'em," sez the Friar, so we all clumb up.

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They pointed out just where Bud Fisher had laid when they found him; and close beside him was a smooth white stone with blood marks on it. The Friar examined the lay o' the ledge; but it did n't tell nothin', so finally he got down on his knees an' studied the blood-stained stone.

Presently he nodded his head and straightened up. "Examine that stone," he said, pointin' with his fingers. We all crowded about an' studied it. The' was finger an' thumb prints all over it; but if you looked close, you could make out the rude image of a man pullin' up a gun which had exploded on the edge of a ledge. It was a smudgey, shakey affair, but if ya looked just right you could make it out. Yet, even this did n't floor Badger-face.

"The Swede there did that himself," he growled; "and this makes him out sneakier 'n we thought him. Let 's hang him, and get rid o' this foolishness."

"Flannigan," sez the Friar in cold, hard tones, "you have gone too far this time. If you had hung Olaf at first, you might have done it from a proverted sense o' justice; but to do it now would be murder; and your own men would n't help. Do any of you men chew tobacco?"

If he had asked for a can o' face-paint, we would n't 'a' been more surprised; but to show the hold the Friar had gained over that crowd, every feller there but Badger-face held out his plug to him.

"Make some tobacco juice, Olaf," he said.

Olaf bit off a hunk the size of a walnut from his own piece, an' proceeded to make juice, as though his life depended upon the amount of it. "Wet your thumb and fingers with it, and make marks on the white stone," commanded the Friar.

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Olaf did so; and when we saw the difference in size and shape, we savvied the game.

"Olaf took Bud's hand and made the marks with Bud's own blood," sez Badger-face.

"Did any one here ever try to handle a dead man's hand?" asked the Friar; and that settled it. We all nodded our heads, except Badger-face, an' he had sense enough to see 'at he had lost the deal, so he did n't say nothin'.

"What I can't see is, why he did n't write," sez the Friar.

"He could n't write," chirps up two punchers at once, an' then they took the rope off Olaf's neck.

They talked it over and decided that the best thing to do was to bury Bud Fisher right there in the cañon. The' was a little cave on the ledge back o' where we were standin' so two o' the punchers went down where they had him laid out under the slickers, an' brought him up. We had to hoist him on ropes, an' the Friar looked a long time into his face.

It was just a lad's face: not bad nor hardened; just the face of a mischievous boy, weary after a day's sport. We all took a look, an' then put him in the little cave an' heaped clods over him an' piled stones on until the door was blocked shut again' varmints.

The Friar sat down on a big rock — he had worked as hard as any of us — and sat thinkin' with his chin in his hand. The Cross brand fellers muttered among themselves for a moment, an' then one of 'em took off his hat, an' sez, "Don't ya think ya 'd ought to speak somethin' over him, parson?"

"Do you want me to?" asked the Friar. And they all nodded their heads.

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So the Friar, he took off his battered hat and stood up before us an' spoke a sermon, while we took off our hats, an' sat around on stones to listen.

I 'm convinced 'at the Friar's long suit lay in the fact 'at he allus preached at himself. Most preachers have already divided the sheep from the goats; and they allus herd off contented with the sheep on green pastures, and preach down at the goats on the barren rocks; but if the Friar made any division at all, he classed himself in with the goats.

You see, in agreein' to help string Olaf should he be convicted, the Friar had bet his soul on the outcome; and this braced him up in that crowd as nothin' else would; for they knew that if he had lost, he 'd have pulled harder on the rope 'n any one else.

It 's child's play to put out a funeral talk over some old lady who has helped the neighbors for seventy or eighty years; but to preach the need of repentance to the livin', and then to smooth things out for 'em after they 've died in their sins, in such a way as it will jolly up the survivors and give 'em nerve to carve cheerful tidings on the tombstone, is enough to make a discriminatin' man sweat his hair out.

The Friar stood with his hands clasped in front of him, and his eyes fixed sort o' dreamy-like on the distance. It was a perfect day, one o' those days 'at can't happen anywhere except in our mountains in the fall o' the year, and my mind drifted off to some lines the Friar was fond of rehearsin', "Where every prospect pleases, an' only man is vile." Then I saw a change come to the Friar's face, and he began to chant the one which begins: "Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days."

He chanted slow, and the words did n't mean much to us;

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but the solemn voice of him dragged across our hearts like a chain. One line of it has haunted me ever since. It seems to suggest a hundred thoughts which I can't quite lay my hand on, and every time I get sad or discouraged, it begins to boom inside me until I see 'at my lot ain't so much different from the rest; and I buck up and get back in the game again: "For I am a stranger with Thee and a sojourner as all my fathers were."

The Friar did n't preach us a long talk, and most of it circled about his favorite text, that a man's real children were those who inherited his character, rather than those who inherited his blood. Once he raised his finger and pointed it at us and sez: "You were fond o' this boy; but did you love him for his good, or did you love him for your own selfishness? I knew him not save through the dark glass of reputation; yet after looking into his dead features, to-day, I think I know him well. Death tells, sometimes, what Life has hid away. I did not see in his face the hard, deep lines of stealthy sin; I saw the open face of a child, tired out after a day wasted in thoughtless and impulsive play; but comin' home at nightfall to have his small cares rubbed away by a lovin' hand — and then, to fall asleep."

O' course, the Friar landed on us good and plenty; but this was the part of his talk which stuck to us after the scoldin' part was all forgotten. When he was through he said a short prayer, and sang in a low tone the one beginnin', "One sweetly solemn thought." His eyes were glistenin' through a mist when he finished this, and he climbed down from the ledge, hurried over to his pinto, and rode off without sayin' another word.

We all sat silent for quite a spell, and then Spider and I got up and nodded good day to 'em. The Cross-branders

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also got up and shook 'emselves, and started down with us — all except Olaf. He sat there on a stone with his fingers run into his hair, and his face hid in his hands. Olaf had had regular religion when he was a child; and it had come back to him up there on the ledge. They say it 's worse 'n a relapse o' the typhoid fever when it hits ya that way. I know this much, Olaf was doubled up worse 'n if he 'd had the colic; and from that time on, the Ty Jones outfit looked mighty worldly to him.

Even Spider Kelley was savin' of his nonsense until we got in sight of the Diamond Dot again.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

QUARRELING FOR PEACE

We had a visitor once, which was a business man. One of his chief diversities was to compare sedantary occupations with what he called the joyous, carefree outdoor life. He said 'at sedantary came from sedan-chair, and meant to sit down at your work. I rode the range next spring until I felt more sedantary 'n an engineer; and sometimes at night it used to strain my intellect to split the difference between myself an' my saddle.

I got out o' humor an' depressed and downright gloomy. Fact is, I was on the point o' rollin' up my spare socks and givin' Jabez a chance to save my board money, when I heard a sound 'at jerked me up through the scum and gave me a glimpse o' the sky again. I was ridin' in about dusk, and I had hung back o' the dust the other fellers had kicked up, so I could be alone and enjoy my misery, when I heard this inspirin' noise.

Ol' Tank Williams once tried to learn to play on a split clarinet a feller had give him, and at first I thought he had found where we had buried it, and had resumed his musical studies; but this outrage came from an instrument a feller has to be mighty cautious about buryin'. It was a human voice, and these were the words it was screechin':

"Fair Hera caught her wayward spouse
With a mortal maid one dawn.
Zeus charmed the maid into a cow,
To save himself a jaw'n'.

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This seemed to me a liber-tee
To take with poor I-oh;
But now I find that he was kind,—
'T was I who did not know.
For girls use slang and girls chew gum,
And drape their forms in silk;
While cows behave with de-co-rum,
And furnish us with milk."

Well, I gave a whoop and threw the spurs into my pony. This was the seventy-ninth verse of Horace's song, and it was his favorite, because it was founded on the Greek religion. I found him perched up behind a rock, and he kept on slammin' chunks of his song up again' the welkin until I shot some dirt loose above his head; and then he climbed down and reunioned with me.

He was lookin' fine, except that some of his waist products had come back, and we talked into each other until the air got too thin to breathe. Then we suppered up and began talkin' again. He had tried all sorts of gymnastical games back East, from playin' golf to ridin' hossback in a park, but it did n't have the right tang. Folks thought he 'd gone insane an' lost his mind, the air did n't taste right, he got particular about how his vittles were cooked; until finally, his endurance melted and began to run down the back of his neck. This decided him 'at he 'd had full as much East as was good for him; so he loaded up a box with firearms, tossed some clothin' into a handbag, and he said his grin had been gettin' wider all the way out until it had hooked holes through the window lights on both sides o' the train.

We were all glad to see him, an' he dove into ranch life like a bullfrog into a cream jar; and he got toughened to a hard saddle in a mighty short time for a feller who had got used to upholstery back East. He said 'at the only

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thing 'at had kept life in him had been to sing his song constant; but he denied 'at this was his main excuse for fleein' from his own range.

He did n't seem to bear a mite o' malice for the joke I had put up on him; but still, I have to own up 'at he half pestered the life out of me with his song. He had what he called a tenor voice; but it was the dolefullest thing I ever heard, and the more he sang, the more his notes stuck to him until I coveted to hear a love-sick hound serenadin' the moon. When he saw it was riskin' his life to drag out any more o' the song, he would pause temptingly, and then begin a lecture on the Greek religion. He got me all mussed up in religion.

Of course, I knew 'at the Injuns had a lot o' sinful religious idees, and I was prepared to give the other heathens plenty o' room to swing in; but not even an Injun would 'a' stood for as immoral a lot as the Greek gods an' goddusses — especially the top one, which Horace called Zeus an' Jove an' Jupiter.

This one did n't have as much decency as a male goat, and yet he had unlimited power. He was allus enticin' some weak-minded human woman into a scrape; and when his wife, who was called Hera and Juno, would get onto his tricks, Zeus would snap his fingers, say "Flip!" and charm the human woman into some sort of an animal. It was a handy scheme for him, true enough; and he did n't care a scene how embarrassin' it was for the human women.

He turned one of 'em into a bear, and, like most other women, she was feared o' bears an' wolves an' snakes, an' the rest o' the company she was forced to associate with. She led a perfectly rotten existence until her own son went bear huntin', and was just on the point of jabbin' a spear

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into her, when even Zeus himself admitted 'at this would be carryin' the joke a leetle too far; so he grabs 'em up and sticks 'em into the sky as a group o' stars.

Horace tried to argue 'at this proved Zeus to be merciful; but as far as I can see it 's as idiotic as havin' the law hang a man for murder. Supposin' some feller had murdered me — would I feel any happier because this feller who could n't put up with me in this world, is sent over to pester me in the next? Course I would n't; but if one o' my friends was murdered, and I had a chance to slay the feller 'at did it, this would give me a lot o' satisfaction an' joy an' pleasure — though I don't say it would be just.

Puttin' the woman an' her son up in the sky did n't square things in Horace's religion, neither; 'cause he said 'at Hera got jealous of Zeus for elevatin' the woman and she went to her foster parents who had charge of the ocean, and made 'em bar this woman and her son from ever goin' into it, the same as the other stars did, and he could prove it any clear night. I told him that he might get away with such a tale as that back East among the indoor people; but that he could n't fool a day-old child with it out our way.

We started this discussion the day after the fall round-up was over, Horace had toughened up before it began, and he had rode with me all through it, and takin' it all in all he was more help than bother, except that he shot too much. When he had come out before, he had been so blame harmless he could n't have shot an innocent bystander; but this trip, he was blazin' away at every livin' thing 'at did n't have a dollar mark on it, and when these was n't offered, he 'd waste ammunition on a mark.

I had some details to tend to after the round-up, so we did n't get a chance to settle the bet for several days. It

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was only a dollar bet; but when the time came, I picked out a couple o' good hosses, bein' minded to look at the stars from the top o' Cat Head.

We reached it about dark, made some coffee, an' fried some bacon. Then we smoked an' talked until it was entirely dark before we ever looked up at the stars. "Now, bluffer," sez I, "show me your woman-bear."

He looked up at the sky, an' then moved on out o' the firelight, an' continued to look at the stars without speakin'. "Don't seem to see 'em, do you?" I taunted.

He turned to me an' spoke in a hushed voice: "Man," he said, "this is wonderful. Why, the way those stars seem to be hangin' down from that velvet dome is simply awe-inspirin'. I 've looked through three good telescopes, but to-night, I seem to be viewin' the heavens for the first time."

"I thought you was n't much familiar with 'em, or you would n't have put out that nonsense about a bear-woman," I sez.

"That," sez he, pointin' to the best known group o' stars in the sky, "is Ursa Major."

"That," sez I, "is the Big Dipper, an' you need n't try to fool me by givin' it one o' your Greek names."

He did n't argue with me; but came back to the fire an' fixed some stones in the shape of the Big Dipper stars, then drew lines with a stick, an' sez 'at this made up the Great Bear. I looked him between the eyes, but he held his face, so I knew he was in earnest. "All right," I sez. "I 'll take you huntin' some o' these days, an' if we chance to come across a silver-tip — a real grizzly, understand, and not a pet varmint backed up again' the risin' sun — you 'll change your mind about what a bear looks like. If that was all your fool Greeks knew about wild animals, I would n't waste

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my time to hear what they had to say about gods an' goddusses. I 'm goin' to start back, an' you can come or not, just as you please." This was the first time I had hinted about the woodchuck; but I was disgusted at his nonsense. He took it all right, though, which proves he was game.

I rode some comin' back, an' he kept tryin' to square himself; but I did n't heed him. Just before we reached the foothills, we saw a fire, an' when we reached it, the Friar was just finishin' his supper. He an' Horace bowed stiffly to each other, an' I was just put out enough by Horace's star-nonsense to feel like roastin' some one; so I decided to roast 'em both.

I sat on my hoss an' looked scornful from one to the other. "Here is two religious folks," I said, impersonal to the pony, but loud enough for all to hear. "Here is two genuwine religious folks! One of 'em is workin' for universal brotherhood, an' the other is peddlin' Greek religion which he claims to be founded on beauty an' love an' harmony. They meet in the mountains, an' bow as cordial as a snow-slide. I think if ever I pick out a religion for myself, I 'll choose the Injun's."

I could n't have asked for any two people to look more foolish 'n they did. Neither one of 'em seemed to have anything to say; so I said to my pony: "Don't you worry none, Muggins, I got a match o' my own, an' if we want to set by a fire, why, we can ride on to some place where wood is free, an' build us one."

"Will you not dismount an' rest a while at my fire?" sez the Friar, in a tone meant as a slap at me.

"No, thank you," sez Horace, "we must be goin'."

"Yes, Friar," I sez hearty. "Me an' Horace has a bet up, an' you can decide it. Also, you owe him somethin' on

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his own hook. You drove him out o' your religion an' into the Greek religion; an' if that don't give him a direct call on you, why then you don't realize what a pest the Greek religion is."

They were so embarassed they were awkward an' spluttery; but I was sure 'at this was good for 'em, so I got off, threw the reins on the ground, an' warmed my hands at the fire; while Horace apologized for me not knowin' any better, an' the Friar assured him coldly that everything was all right, an' he was rejoiced to have a little company.

Well, for as much as ten minutes, we sat around enjoyin' what I once heard a feller call frapayed convivuality, an' then I took pity on 'em an' loosened things up by tellin' the Friar about the trip me an' Tank an' Horace had took into the mountains to pacify our nerves, just before he had stumbled on Horace that other time. O' course I did n't tell it all, as I did n't want Horace to know any more about it than he knew already; but I told what a seedy little windfall Horace had been when we started out, an' how he had come back crackin' jokes an' singin' the infernalest song 'at ever was made up. I finally got Horace to sing ten or fifteen minutes o' this song, an' he droned it out so unusual doleful that he fetched a chuckle out o' the Friar, an' then we were feelin' easy an' comfortable, like outdoor men again.

Then I told the Friar what our bet was, expectin' o' course that he 'd back me up; but what did he do but say 'at Horace was right as far as the stars was concerned. This tickled Horace a lot, an' he began to crow over me until I concluded to test the Friar; so I sez to Horace that his religion havin' been endorsed by the Friar himself, I 'd become a Greek the first chance I had.

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Horace did n't take any trouble to hide his satisfaction, an' he began to expound upon the beauty, an' the art, an' the freedom of the Greek religion at a great rate.

"They certainly was free," I sez, "an' easy too, an' I don't deny 'at they might 'a' been some weight in art an' beauty; but, confound 'em, they did n't know as much about bears as I know about e-lectricity. I 'd just like to see Zeus himself go up into the Tetons in the early spring, to hunt for Big Dippers. I 'll bet the first hungry grizzly he 'd come across would set him right on the bear question."

This was a good opener, an' in about two shakes, the Friar an' Horace had locked horns. Horace was a crafty, sarcastic, cold-blooded little argufier; while the Friar was warm an' eager an' open as the day. It was one o' the best gabbin' matches I have ever started.

They dealt mostly in names I had never heard of before, although once in a while they 'd turn up one a little familiar on account of Horace havin' told me some tale of it. The Friar knew as much about these things as Horace did; but he called 'em myths, an' said while they did n't mean anything when took literal, they had great historical value when regarded merely as symbols. He said that I-oh — the human maid which Zeus had turned into a cow — was nothin' but the moon, an' that Argus of the hundred eyes was simply the sky full o' stars; and that the old god which ate up his children was nothin' but time.

I did n't really understand much of what they said; but I did enjoy watchin' 'em bandy those big words about. We all use a lot o' words we don't understand; but as long as they sound well an' fill out a gap it don't much matter. These two, though, seemed to understand all the words they used, an' I was highly edified.

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As they talked, an' I kept watchin' the Friar's face, I learned somethin': the Friar had been mighty lonesome with only us rough fellers to talk with, an' had been hungerin' for just such a confab as this to loosen up his subsoil a little.

Every now an' again, I 'd cast an eye up to the stars; an' while I did n't know the religious names of 'em, I knew how to tell time by 'em; an' I knew 'at those two would have a turn when they remembered to look at their watches. It was full one o'clock when the conversation came to its first rest, an' then the Friar recalled what I had said when I had dismounted; so he up an' asked Horace point-blank what he had had to do with makin' Horace quit the church.

Horace was minded to sidestep this at first by intimatin' that I was not responsible for what I said; but he finally came across and told the Friar that he had give up that church for about the same reason that the Friar himself had. This set the Friar back purty well on his haunches, an' put him on the defensive. He had hammered Horace freely before, but now when he conscientiously tried to defend the gang he had left, and also excuse himself for leavin', he had some job on his hands.

I thought Horace had him when he compared the Golden Age of Greece an' Plato's Republic with the Dark Ages, which was a stretch of years when the Christian religion about had its own way; but the Friar admitted that what he called economical interests had put a smirch on the church durin' the Dark Ages, an' then he sailed into the Golden Age of Greece, showin' that slavery was the lot of most o' the decent people durin' that period. When I fell asleep, they were shakin' their fists friendly at one another, about

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Plato's Republic, which I found out afterwards was only a made-up story.

Bein' edicated is a good deal like bein' a good shot in a quiet community — once in a long while it 's mighty comfortin', but for the most part it 's nothin' but shootin' at a target.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

PEACE TO START A QUARREL

It was broad day when I woke up — that is, the sun was beginnin' to rise — an' the fire had dwindled to coals, the breeze had begun to stir itself, an' I was consid'able chilly. I saw the Friar's nose stickin' out o' one side of his tarp an' Horace's nose stickin' out the other, an' I grinned purty contentedly.

My experience is, that quarrelsome people usually get along well together an' make good company; but sad, serious, silent, polite folks is about the wearin'est sort of an affliction a body can have about.

I once heard a missionary preach about what a noble thing it was to control the temper. He must have been a good man, 'cause he was unusual solemn an' wore his hair long an' oily; but he only looked at one side o' the question. I 've known fellers who had such good control o' their tempers that after they 'd once been put out o' humor over some little thing, they could keep from bein' good tempered again for a year. And then again, when a feller keeps too tight a holt on his temper, his hands get numb, an' his temper 's liable to shy at some silly thing an' get clear away from him.

What I liked about both the Friar an' Horace was, 'at they had n't froze up all their feelin's. It was possible to get 'em stirred up about things, an' this allus struck me as bein' human; so I was glad to see Horace warmin' his feet in

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the small o' the Friar's back, an' I whistled a jig under my breath while gettin' breakfast.

They grumbled consid'able when I rousted 'em out; but by the time they had soused their heads in the crick, they were in good humor again; an' hungry! Say! Ever since I 'd give him his treatment, Horace had had an appetite like a stray dog; while the Friar allus was a full hand at clearin' tables, except on his one off-day a week. I gave the Friar a wink just as Horace splashed into his third cup o' coffee, an' sez: "Friar, you should have seen this creature when he first came out here. His muscles had all turned to fat, so that he could hardly wobble from one place to another, an' he was so soft that when he 'd lie down at night, his nerves would stick into him an' keep him awake. Now, if it was n't for that fringy thing he wears on his face, he 'd look almost exactly like a small-sized human."

The only come-back Horace made was to start to sing with his mouth full o' cornbread an' bacon. This was more 'n any one could stand, so I tipped him over backward, an' asked the Friar which way he was headin'.

The Friar's face went grave at once; and then he began to post me up on Olaf the Swede. I had heard some rumors that summer, but had n't paid much heed to 'em. It now turned out that the Friar and Olaf had struck up friendly affiliations; so he was able to give me all the details.

Badger-face had a disposition like a bilious wolf, and when he was denied the satisfaction o' jerkin' Olaf out o' this world, he had turned to with earnest patience to make Olaf regret it as much as he did. Olaf could stand more 'n the youngest son in a large family o' mules, but he had his limitations, the same as the rest of us; so when he saw that

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Badger was engaged in makin' the earth no fit place for him to habitate, he began to feel resentful.

When a boss is mean, he is still the boss and he don't irritate beyond endurance; but a foreman is nothin' but a fellow worker, after all; so when he gets mean, he 's small and spidery in his meanness; and I reckon 'at Olaf was justified in tryin' to unjoint Badger-face, thorough and complete.

O' course, Ty had to back up Badger for the sake o' discipline; but he did n't wreak any vengeance on Olaf when he tendered in his resignation, which proves 'at Ty still was full o' respect for Olaf. Badger was groanin' on his back when Olaf left; but he called out that he intended to get square, if he had to wear all the curves off his own body to do it.

Olaf had the gift o' sensin' men, all right; but his judgment was n't such as to make a yearlin' bull willin' to swap, and what he did was to take the Pearl Crick Spread as a homestead. It was only about fifteen miles from the Cross brand ranch house, and it was one o' the choicest bits in the whole country. This act was on a par with an infant baby sneakin' into a wolf den to steal meat. The Friar put the finishin' touch by sayin' that Olaf had bought the old, rundown T brand, and then I lost patience.

"Does Olaf sleep with a lightnin' rod connected to the back of his neck?" I asked as sober as a boil.

"What do ya mean?" asked the Friar, who was innocent about some things.

"Well, that looks like another good way to attract trouble," sez I.

"Olaf does not want any trouble," sez the Friar with dignity. "All he wants is an opportunity to work his claim in

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peace. He has more self-control 'n airy other man I 've ever known."

" It 's a handy thing to have, too," sez I, " providin' a feller knows how to use it. Why, ya could change a T brand to a Cross quicker 'n a one-armed Mexican could roll a cigarette. Ty Jones 'll get more o' that brand 'n ever Olaf will. How is Kit Murray gettin' along?"

" She is a fine girl," sez the Friar, his face lightin'. " She has cut out all her wild ways, and Mother Shipley sez her daughter thinks as much of her as if they was sisters. I got word last week 'at her husband died in a hospital; and I hope she 'll marry Olaf some day."

" Well, I 'll bet the liquor again' the bottle 'at she never does it," sez I. " In the first place, she 's got too much style, and in the second, she 's got too much sense. Ty 's already got more stuff 'n he can take care of through a dry summer, and the next one we have, he is goin' to need Pearl Crick Spread. A grizzly traffics along without bein' disturbed, until he gets the idee that he owns consid'able property, and has legal rights. Then one day the' don't seem to be anything else demandin' attention, so out go a parcel o' men and harvest the grizzly. That 's the way it 'll be with Olaf."

" I advised him to move," sez the Friar; " but he 's set in his ways."

" Self-control," sez I. " I was workin' in a mine once with a mule and a Hungarian; and both of 'em had an unusual stock o' self-control. One day right after a fuse had been lit, the mule decided to rest near the spot; an' the Hun decided to make the mule proceed. We argued with 'em as long as it was safe; but the mule had his self-control an' all four feet set, and the Hun was usin' *his* self-control an'

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a shovel. All we ever found was the mule's right hind leg stickin' through the Hungarian's hat, and we buried these jus' as they was."

The Friar sighed, pursed up his lips, and sez: "I wish I could help him."

"Help him all you can, Friar," sez I; "but after the fuse is burnin', you pull yourself out to safety. Ty Jones could easy spare you without goin' into mournin'."

The Friar rode on about his business, an' me an' Horace went back to the ranch, him pumpin' me constant for further particulars about Olaf an' Kit. "Horace," sez I finally, "did you ever see these folks?"

"I never did," sez he.

"Then," sez I, "what you got again' 'em 'at you want 'em to marry?"

"Marriage," sez he with the recklessness common to old bachelors, "is the proper condition under which humans should live — and besides, I don't like what you tell about Ty Jones."

From that on, Horace began to talk hunt; and when Horace talked anything, he was as hard to forget as a split lip. He had brought out some rifles which the clerk had told him would kill grizzlies on sight, and Horace had an awful appetite to wipe out the memory o' that woodchuck.

I admit that no one has any right to be surprised at anything some one else wants to do; but I never did get quite hardened to Horace Walpole Bradford. When ya looked at him, ya knew he was a middle-aged man with side-burn whiskers; but when ya listened to his talk, he sounded like a fourteen-year-old boy who had run away to slaughter Injuns in wholesale quantities.

All of his projecs were boyish; he purt' nigh had his

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backbone bucked up through the peak of his head before he 'd give in that ridin' mean ones was a trade to itself; and the same with ropin', and several other things. It ground him bitter because his body had n't slipped back as young as his mind, an' he worked at it constant, tryin' to make it so.

He wore black angora chaps, two guns, silver spurs, rattlesnake hat-band, Injun-work gauntlets, silk neckerchief through a silver slip, leather wristlets, an' as tough an expression as he could work up; but the one thing of his old life he refused to discard was his side-burns. Sometimes he 'd go without shavin' for two weeks, an' we 'd all think he was raisin' a beard; but one day he 'd catch sight of himself in a lookin'-glass, an' then he 'd grub out the new growth an' leave the hedge to blossom in all its glory.

We were long handed for the winter as usual, an' the' was n't any reason why we could n't take a hunt; so Tank an' Spider egged him on, an' I was n't much set again' it myself. Horace agreed to pay us our wages while we were away, an' offered Jabez pay for the hosses; but o' course he would n't listen to it; and for a few days he even talked some o' goin' with us, though he did n't ever care much for huntin'.

'Finally we started out with a big pack train an' enough ammunition for an army. Besides me an' Horace, the' was Tank, Spider Kelley, Tillte Dutch, an' Mexican Slim. Slim was to do the cookin', an' the rest of us were to divvy up on the other chores all alike, Horace not to be treated much different simply because he was payin' us our wages; but he was to have the decidin' vote on where we should go an' how long we 'd stay. It was fine weather most o' the time, though now an' again we 'd get snowed up for a day or so in the high parts.

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I had allus felt on friendly terms with the wild creatures; an' I had told him before we started that I would n't have no part in usin' hosses for bear-bait, nor shootin' bears in traps, nor killin' a lot o' stuff we had no use for; but Horace turned out to be as decent a hunter as I ever met up with, an' after the second day out he did as little silly shootin' as any of us. He was n't downright blood-thirsty, like a lot of 'em who get their first taste too late in life. He cared more for the fun o' campin' out an' stalkin' game than he did for killin'. We only got one silver-tip, most of 'em havin' holed up; but we found all the other game we wanted. Horace killed the grizzly, which was a monster big one, and this wiped the woodchuck off his record, and inflated his self-respect until the safety valve on his conceit boiler was fizzin' half the time.

We made a permanent camp not far from Olaf's shack, an' it did n't take me long to see 'at the foxy Horace was more interested in Olaf an' his war with Ty Jones than he was in huntin'. As soon as we had our camp arranged, he got me to take him over to Pearl Crick Spread to call on Olaf. I told him that Olaf was n't what you 'd call sociable; but he insisted, so we went.

We found Olaf in an infernal temper, an' some tempted to take it out on the first human he met; but this did n't phaze Horace. He thought he could start Olaf by tellin' him that Kit Murray was a widow; but the Friar had already told him and Olaf would n't thaw worth a cent. He kept on askin' questions, even when they was n't answered, until Olaf got hungry an' asked us in to eat dinner with him. After we had eaten, we sat around the fire smokin', an' Horace looked as contented as a cat. He kept at his questionin' until he got Olaf to talkin' freer 'n I had supposed he could talk.

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Horace tried him out on all sorts o' things, an' when Olaf snubbed him, why, he just overlooked it an' tried somethin' else. Finally he tried his hand at religion, an' this was what loosened Olaf up. Now Olaf was actually religious, and called himself a Christian, but the' was a heap o' difference between his brand o' it an' the Friar's.

Olaf's God took more solid satisfaction in makin' hell utterly infernal than a civilized community takes in a penetentiary; an' Olaf was purty certain as to who was goin' there. When he got to talkin' religion in earnest, his face grew hard an' his eyes bright, an' he gloated over the souls in torment till he showed his teeth in a grin. The' was n't any doubt in his mind that Ty Jones was goin' to be among those present, an' this led him into tellin' what had put him so far out o' humor before we 'd come along.

He had found another one of his cows shot an' only a couple o' steaks cut off. He fair frothed at the mouth when he told us this, an' he did n't make any bones of givin' Ty the credit for it. He cut loose an' told us a string o' things 'at he knew about Ty, an' ya could n't blame him for feelin' sore. He talked along in a rush after he got started, tellin' o' the way 'at Ty changed brands an' butchered other fellers' stock an' was n't above takin' human life when it stood in his way. "He made me as big a devil as he is," sez Olaf; "an' now he knows 'at I can't get any backin'; so he is just persecutin' me; but some o' these days, I 'll get a chance at him."

Horace had dropped into a silence while Olaf was talkin'; but now he raised a finger at me, an' said: "I 'll tell you what we 'll do: instead of huntin' ordinary wild beasts, we 'll just keep watch on Olaf's stuff, an' when any one

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bothers it, why, we 'll take 'em into some town with a jail."

Olaf shook his head, an' I told Horace that the' was n't any law for big cattle men; but Horace was all worked up, an' after we 'd left Olaf an' started for camp, he did n't talk of anything else. He put it before the boys; but they were all again' it, an' told him a lot o' tales about fellers who had tried to buck the big cattle men. Horace called us all cowards; but we only laughed at his ignorance an' let him carry on as far as he liked. He sat up way into the night broodin' over it, an' from that on he did a lot o' scoutin' on his own hook. We used to keep an eye on him, though; so after all he had his own way about it, an' Olaf's stuff was watched purty close.

The boys was proud of Horace, just as they 'd have been proud of a fightin' terrier; but they was worried about him, too, in just about the same way.

"I tell you, that little runt would shoot to kill if he got a chance," sez Tank Williams, one night while Horace was away.

"Aw ya can't tell," sez Spider. "He thinks he would; but he 's never been up against it yet, an' ya can't tell."

"Well, what if he did shoot," sez Slim, "we would n't have to mix in, would we?"

"You know blame well we 'd mix in," sez Tank, "an' you can't tell where it would end. If Horace had 'a' come out here when he was a kid, he 'd 'a' turned out one o' the bad men for true. It 's in his blood. Look at him! when he came here first, he did n't have no more get-up 'n a sofy piller; but look what he 's gone through since. I saw him, myself, march along without food for four days, an' when we came up with that cow, he was willin' to help kill her

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with a rock or strangle her to death, an' he did n't make no more bones o' calf-milkin' her than a coyote would. He started out in life with more devilment in him 'n any of us, an' what he 's achin' for now is a mix-in with the Cross brand outfit. That 's my guess."

"An' that 's my guess," I chimed in; but just then we heard two shots close together, then a pause an' three more shots. We jammed on our hats an' guns an' rushed outside. It was a moonlight night, an' we hustled in the direction o' the shots. Before long we made out Horace an' Tillte Dutch comin' towards us, an' Horace was struttin' like Cupid the bulldog used to walk, after he 'd flung a steer. It was the first time I 'd ever noticed this, but I noticed it plain, out there in the moonlight.

"What 's up?" I asked.

"I reckon 'at somebody knows by now that Olaf's stuff is havin' a little interest took in it," sez Horace.

We came back into the old log cabin where we was campin', an' Dutch told about how Horace had got him to walk with him, an' had sat down on a rock where they could see Olaf's little bunch o' cattle grazin'. He said 'at Horace sat with his rifle across his lap and kept watch like an Injun scout.

After a time they saw two men creep out of a ravine not far from where they was sittin' an' sneak down on the bunch o' cows. One of 'em had shot a cow, an' Horace had shot him, bringin' him down, but not killin' him. The two had run for the ravine, an' Horace had tried to cut 'em off, an' he had gone along 'cause Horace had; but the two had got to their hosses first. Each o' the two had taken one shot, an' Horace had shot back but none o' these last shots had hit anything, an' the two had got away.

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"I 'll bet they have n't got so far away but what we 'll hear from 'em again," sez Tank.

"The thing for us to do is to start back to the Diamond Dot," sez I.

"We shall stay here, an' see what happens," sez Horace, lightin' his pipe. His eyes were dancin' an' he was all puffed up. I did n't say any more. I just looked at him. He was the same old Horace, side-burns an' all; but still the' was enough difference for me to begin to regret havin' give him the treatment. I had cured his nerve so complete it seemed likely to boss the whole crowd of us into trouble.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

A PROGRESSIVE HUNT

THE Friar sez it 's all rot about men bein' better for havin' sowed their wild oats when young. He sez 'at it 's utter foolishness to sow any crop ya don't want to harvest; but I dunno. I don't mind havin' a colt try to turn himself inside out with me on its back; but I 'm some prejudiced again' an old hoss which is likely to pitch when I 've got other business to attend to. When a young hoss is mean, why, ya can reason it out of him; but when an old hoss turns bad, you might just as well put the outlaw label on him an' turn him adrift.

We could n't do a thing with Horace after he 'd taken his shot at the feller who potted one of Olaf's cows. Ol' Tank Williams was huge in size an' had a ponderous deep voice which rumbled around in him like a bulldog croakin' in a barrel; an' he decided that it was his duty to be firm with Horace, seein' the way 'at he had bluffed him when we went on that trip for the nerves; so the follerin' mornin' he put a scowl on his face, grabbed Horace by the chest of his shirt, lifted him so 'at nothin' but the tips of his toes touched, an' sez: "Look here, you little whippersnapper, we agreed to go where you said an' stay as long as you said; but we meant on a game-huntin' trip. You have n't any idee what you 're up again' out here, an' you got to give in an' come back with us."

Tank's free eye rolled about in his head, runnin' wilder 'n

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I 'd ever seen it; but Horace was n't as much phazed as if a fly had bit him. He scowled down his eyebrows, an' piped out in his squeaky tenor: "Take your hand off me, Tank — and take it off now."

"I 've a notion to raise it up an' squash ya," sez Tank.

"Yes," sez Horace, without blinkin' a winker, "you 've got notions all right; but they lie so far to the interior of ya that they generally weaken before they find their way out. Take your hand off me."

Well, Tank was beat. He gave Horace a shove, but Horace was light on his feet, an' he never lost his balance. He just danced backward until he had his brakes set, an' then he fetched up in front o' the fire, put his fists on his hips, an' stared up at Tank haughty.

"Ignorance," sez he, "is the trouble with most people. The ignorant allus judge by appearances. If body-size was what really counted, why, we 'd have an elephant for an emperor. Instead of which we use 'em to push logs around. Goliath did a lot o' talkin' about squashin' David, but as soon as David got around to it, he fixed Goliath all ready for the coroner. Napoleon was of small size, an' fat, an' nervous, but he did n't count it a fair day's work unless he had presented one of his relatives with a full-sized kingdom. Where are the buffalos — where are they — the big clumsy brutes! They 're shut up out o' harm's way, that 's where they are; but where are the mosquitoes? Why the mosquitoes are takin' life easy at all the fashionable summer resorts. If you feel like freightin' your big, fat carcass back to where it don't run any risk o' bein' bumped into, why go ahead; but I 'm goin' to stick around here an' see what happens."

Well, there we were: we did n't none of us have the

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courage to own up 'at we were afraid of anything 'at Horace was n't afraid of; so we decided to stick with him, but that he had to take the blame. It was Tillte Dutch who said this, an' Horace looked at him an' grinned. "Take the blame?" sez he. "Why you big chump, it 's the small-sized men who allus take the blame. The big boobs rush about, makin' a lot o' noise; but they only do what the small-sized men tell 'em to. I 'll take the blame all right, an' if you back me up, you 'll be right pleased to have a share in the kind o' blame the's goin' to be. This Ty Jones outfit is nothin' but a set o' cowardly bullies who sneak around in the dark doin' underhanded work; but I intend to let the daylight in."

"I 'll bet the daylight will be let in, somewhere," sez I; "but I 'm just fool enough to stick with ya."

Tank was still smartin' from the way it had been handed to him. "Say," sez he, "p'raps you don't know it; but that David you was cacklin' about a while ago was n't nothin' but a sheep-herder."

"That don't change no brands," sez Horace, who did n't have any more use for a sheep-herder 'n we did. "He was a small-sized man, an' he just drove sheep a while to help his father out. Sheep-herdin' was n't his regular trade. Bossin' men an' fightin' an' bein' a king was his natural line o' business. It allus seems to me 'at big, overgrown men ought to be sheep-herders, so they could drive about in house-wagons, an' not wear down so many good hosses."

Ol' Tank slammed about, makin' a lot o' noise; but he had lost this deal, an' it was plain to see.

"I 'm goin' to ride over to Olaf's, an' tell him about what happened last night, an' say 'at we 'll keep an eye on his stuff if so be he wants to take a little trip to Billings," said

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Horace; and when he started I went along with him. At first Olaf was so white-hot about havin' another cow killed that he could n't think; but finally he looked at Horace a long time, an' said: "You have very brave flame, an' you speak true. I shall go to Billings, an' trust everything with you."

I was flabbergasted clear out o' line at this; but Olaf packed some stuff on one hoss, flung his saddle on another, an' set off at once. Now, I knew Olaf to be slow an' stubborn, an' I could n't see through this.

After Olaf had rode out o' sight to the north, Horace sez: "Has he allus been crazy?"

"He 's not crazy," sez I.

"Then what did he mean by sayin' I had a very brave flame an' that I spoke true?" sez Horace. "Course he 's crazy. Did n't you notice his eyes."

"Yes," I sez, "I 've noticed his eyes a lot; but I don't think he 's crazy — except in thinkin' 'at Kit Murray 'll marry him. Why, she would as soon think o' marryin' a he-bear as Olaf."

"Well, I think they have drove him crazy," sez Horace; "but I 'm goin' to bestir myself in his favor."

He took himself as serious as if he had been Napoleon an' David both; an' I could smell trouble plain. We decided to move our camp down to Olaf's, an' wrangle his herd into the Spread every night. Pearl Crick Spread was as fine a little valley as a body ever saw; filled with cottonwoods an' snugglin' down out o' the wind behind high benches. The crick came in through a gorge, an' went out through a gorge; an' it was plain to me that the Spread was worth fightin' for.

When we got back to the camp we found that a couple o'

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Cross brand boys had happened along, by accident, of course, an' were tryin' to swap news o' the weather for news o' the neighbors. Our crowd had n't loosened up none; and as soon as we came back the Cross-branders left.

Horace looked pleased. "I bet I got one of 'em last night," sez he, shakin' his head.

Well, we all grinned, we could n't help it. "I bet you get another chance at 'em, too," sez Slim. Our outfit had been peaceable for so long that the prospect of trouble actually made us feel nervous enough to show it.

We moved down to Olaf's, and each night we fetched in his little bunch o' cows, an' allus kept up some hosses in the corral. The Cross-branders used to wander by our place purty frequent, but allus in the matter o' business.

One day, after we 'd been livin' at Olaf's about a week, Badger-face Flannigan, an' a pair of as mean-lookin' Greasers as ever I saw, came ridin' along. Me an' Horace had been up in the hills after some fresh meat, an' we see them before they saw us. They were ridin' slow an' snoopin' about to see what they could pick up, an' when they saw us they looked a bit shifty for a moment.

Then Badger wrinkled up his face in what was meant for a friendly grin, an' sez: "Hello, fellers. Have you-un's bought Olaf out?"

"Nope," sez I. "We 're just out here for a little huntin'; an' Olaf got us to look after his stuff for a few days while he went visitin'."

"Was n't the' any huntin' closer to home?" sez Badger-face, a little sarcastic.

"Not the kind o' huntin' we prefer," sez Horace, sort o' dreamy like.

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Badger-face drilled a look into Horace, who had put on his most no-account expression. "What 's your favorite game," sez he, "snow-shoe rabbits?"

"Oh, no," drawled Horace as if he felt sleepy, "silver-tips an' humans is our favorite game; but o' course the spring is the best time — for silver-tips."

"Where might you be from?" asked Badger-face.

"I might be from Arizona or Texas," sez Horace; "but I ain't. I 'm a regular dude. Can't you tell by my whiskers?"

Badger-face was so puzzled when Horace gave a little rat-laugh that I had to laugh too; and ya could see the blood come into Badger's cheeks, but still, he could n't savvy this sort o' game, so he could n't quite figure out how to start anything.

Horace had practiced what he called a muscle-lift, which he said he used to see the other kids do on parallel bars; and now he slipped to the ground an' tightened his cinch an' cussed about the way it had come loose, as natural as life. Then he put one hand on the horn an' the other on the cantle an' drew himself up slow. He kept on pushin' himself after his breast had come above the saddle until he rested at arm's length. Then he flipped his right leg over, an' took his seat as though it was nothin' at all. Any one could see it was a genuwine stunt, though it was of no earthly use to a ridin' man.

Now, just because the' was no sense to this antic, it made more of an impression on Badger-face than the fanciest sort o' shootin' or ropin' would 'a' done; an' he puzzled over what sort of a speciment Horace might be, till it showed in his face.

"Come on down an' have supper with us," sez Horace.

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"You can see for yourself what the prospect for fresh meat is; so you can be sure of a welcome."

"No, we can't very well come this evenin'," sez Badger-face.

"Why not?" sez Horace. "You look to me like a man who was gettin' bilious for the want of a little sociability. Come on down an' we 'll swap stories, an' have a few drinks, an' I 'll sing ya the best song you ever hearkened to."

"No, we got to be goin'," sez Badger-face; an' he an' the Greasers rode off while Horace chuckled under his breath as merry as a magpie.

"That 's what you call a bad man, is it?" sez he. "I tell you that feller 's a rank coward."

"Would you have the nerve to pick up a horn-toad?" sez I.

"No," sez he; "'cause they 're poison."

"They ain't no more poison 'n a frog is," I sez; "but most people thinks they are, an' that is why strangers are afraid of 'em. Now, Badger-face ain't no coward. He 's a shootin' man; but he can't make you out, an' this is what makes him shy of ya."

"Well," sez Horace, "I 'd rather be a free horn-toad than a mule in harness. Come on, let 's go eat."

The next afternoon Horace went along to help bring in the bunch o' cattle; an' some one up on the hill took a shot at him. He could n't ride up the hill, so he hopped off the pony, an' started up on foot. Mexican Slim was closest to him, an' he started after; but the feller got away without leavin' any trace. Horace was wonderful pleased about it, an' strutted more than common.

"There now," sez he after supper; "do you mean to tell

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me 'at that feller was n't a coward? Why the' ain't enough sand in their whole outfit to blind a flea!"

We just set an' smoked in silence. When a feller as little as him once begins to crow, the's nothin' to do but wait till his spurs get clipped.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A LITTLE GUN-PLAY

It 's curious how hard it is, sometimes, to get trouble started. We all knew 'at the Cross-branders was ready to clean us out, an' itchin' for the job; but the's one curious little holdback in the make-up of every healthy animal in the world. Every sane animal the' is wants self-defence as his excuse for takin' life. I admit that now and again beasts an' men both get a sort o' crazy blood-lust, an' just kill for the sake of it; but it 's the rare exception.

One of us allus made it a point to go along with Horace; an' most times when we 'd meet up with any o' the Cross-branders, they 'd never miss the chance to fling some polite smart talk at him; but the little cuss could sass back sharper 'n they could, an' I reckon they was suspicious that he would n't 'a' been so cool if he had n't had bigger backin' than was in sight. It was perfectly natural to think 'at he had been sent out as a lure by some big cattle outfit, or even the government; so they went cautious till they could nose out the game.

One day Badger-face an' the two Greasers came along when Horace was out ridin' with Tillte Dutch. Dutch was one o' these innocent-lookin' Germans — big, wide-open eyes, a half smile, an' a sort of a leanin' to fat. He never had but one come-back to anything — which was to splutter; but he was dependable in a pinch.

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"Whatever made you so unspeakable little?" sez Badger-face to Horace.

Horace looked behind him, an' all about, an' then sez in surprise: "Who, me?"

"Yes, you," sez Badger-face. "You seem to dry down a little smaller each day."

"Well," sez Horace, speakin' in a low secret-tellin' tone, "I 'll tell ya; but I don't want ya to blab it to every one ya see. When I was a young chap, I used to go with a big, awkward, potato-brained slob, about your size. I could outshoot him, out-ride him, run circles around him, an' think seven times while he was squeezin' the cells of his brain so they 'd touch up again' each other; but one day he made a bet that he could eat more hog-meat 'n I could; an' he won the bet. When I found out that the' was one single thing 'at this big, loose-jointed galoot could beat me at, I felt so blame small that I never got over it, an' this is why I disguise myself in these whiskers."

The two Greasers could n't help but grin, an' the fool Dutchman sniggered. This was more 'n Badger-face could stand. He shot his hand across an' pulled his gun quick as a flash; but Horace did n't move, he just sat still, with a friendly smile on his face; an' Badger-face sat there with his gun in his hand, scowlin' jerk-lightnin' at him.

Spider an' Slim had gone after meat that day, an' they came into view with the carcase of a doe, just as Badger drew his gun. Me an' Tank was listed to wrangle in the bunch, an' we came ridin' along just after the other two came into view. The Greasers gave a little cough an' Badger-face looked up an' saw us. It looked like a put-up job, all right; an' chariots of fire, but he was mad! Pullin' a gun on a man is the same as shootin' at him. Badger-face

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had been tricked into givin' us just grounds to slaughter him, and he was n't quite sure what move to make next. Our outfit had been purty well advertized, through cleanin' out the Brophy gang, me an' Mexican Slim were both two-gun men an' known to be quick an' accurate, while Tank was ever-lastin'ly gettin' into trouble, owin' to his friendly feelin's for liquor. As we drew closer we made our smoke-wagons ready, while his two Greasers kept their hands in plain view, and harmless.

Badger had a trapped look in his face; but he did n't say anything, an' he did n't cover Horace with his gun; he just held it ready. We did the same with ours, an' it was the foolest lookin' group I was ever part of. Ol' Tank was the one who finally started things. "Look here, Badger-face," he bellowed, "if you so much as harm a hair o' those blamed ol' whiskers, why, we 'll have to put ya out o' business."

Horace turned an' looked at Tank in surprise. "Aw, put up your gun," he said. "Badger-face ain't in earnest. We had an argument the other day: I said 'at a man lost time crossin' his hand to pull his gun, an' he said it could be done quicker that way 'n any other; so to-day he joked me about bein' as small in the body as he is in the brain, an' I came back at him, also jokin' in a friendly way; an' he took this excuse to pull his gun on me, without any ill intent; but only to prove how quick he could do it. It stuck in his holster, though; an' if we 'd been in earnest, I 'd have had to kill him. I 've had him covered all this time; but you can see for yourselves 'at his gun ain't cocked. Now put up your guns, and next time, don't be silly."

I know 'at Horace did n't have any gun in his hand when we came up; but when he stopped speakin', he pulled his hand with a cocked gun in it out from under his hoss's

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mane, an' Badger-face was the most surprised of any of us.

"Come on down to supper, Badger-face, an' I 'll sing ya my song," sez Horace. "We allus seem to have fresh deer-meat when you happen along."

We all put up our guns along with Badger-face, an' he mumbled some sort of an excuse an' rode away with the Greasers. O' course we 'd ought to 'a' killed him right then, 'cause he was more full o' hate than a rattler; but the simple truth was, that Horace had gained control over us complete, an' we let him have his way.

"When did you get that gun in your hand, Horace?" I sez to him after supper. "You did n't have no gun when I rode up."

"That 's what 's puzzlin' Badger-face right this minute," sez Horace. "I did n't draw that gun until Tank made his talk; but at the same time I was n't as defenceless as I looked. I have told you all the time 'at that man did n't have the nerve to harm me. He 's a coward."

"I reckon you 'll be killed one o' these days, still believin' that," sez ol' Tank. "How much fightin' experience have you ever had?"

"How much did Thesis ever have?" asked Horace.

"Never heard of him," sez Tank. "Who was he?"

"He was a Greek hero," sez Horace. "He never had had a fight till he started out to go to his father; but he cleaned out all the toughs along the way, an' when he reached his father, who was king of Athens, he found 'em just ready to send out seven young men an' seven maidens, which they offered up each year to the Minnietor, which was a beast with the body of a man, and the head of a bull, just like Badger-face. Thesis volunteered, an'

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what he did was to kill the Minnietor an' end all that nonsense."

"Well, I never heard tell o' that before, an' I don't more 'n half believe it now," sez Tank; "but I 'm willin' to bet four dollars 'at the Minnietor did n't know as much about gun-fightin' as what Badger-face does. He 'll get ya yet, you see if he don't."

"Tell ya what I 'm game to do," sez Horace. "I 'm game to go right to Ty Jones's ranch house alone. Do ya dare me?"

"No, you don't do that," sez I. "That 's a heap different proposition. Ty Jones would n't pull his gun without shootin'; and besides, he 'd most likely set his dogs on ya."

"Well, I own up 'at I don't want no dealin's with dogs," sez Horace, thoughtful. "Dogs have n't enough imagination to work on. If they 're trained to bite, why, that 's what they do; but give a human half a chance, an' he 'll imagine a lot o' things which are not so. You could n't tell Badger-face a big enough tale about me to make him doubt it. I tell ya, I got him scared."

We did n't argue with him none; the' was some doubt about him havin' Badger-face fooled; but the' was n't any doubt about him havin' himself fooled — which is the main thing after all, I reckon. Anyway, we let Horace sit there the whole evenin', tellin' Greek-hero tales which must have blistered the imagination o' the feller 'at first made 'em up.

Along about nine o'clock we began to stretch an' yawn; but before we got to bed, Mexican Slim said 'at he heard a noise at the corral, an' we all looked at one another, thinkin' it was the Cross-branders; but Horace was the first one to get back into his boots an' belt; an' he also insisted on bein'

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the first to open the door, which he did as soon as we blew out the candle. Then we all filed out an' sneaked down toward the corral; but first thing we knew, a voice out o' the dark whispered: "This is me — Olaf. Is everything all right?"

We told him it was, an' he whistled three times. You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather when Kit Murray an' the Friar came ridin' up; an' then we turned the ponies loose an' went into the house. It only had two rooms, countin' the lean-to kitchen, an' we made consid'able of a crowd; but we were all in good spirits, on account of Olaf gettin' the girl an' us bein' able to hand him back his stuff with not one head missin'.

It had been some interval since I 'd seen Kit Murray, an' I was surprised to view the change in her. She did n't look so much older, but all the recklessness had gone out of her face, an' it had a sort of a quiet, holy look about it. "Kit," I sez, "I wish ya all the joy the' is; but I 'd 'a' been willin' to have bet my eyes 'at you 'd never take Olaf. I was glad to see him go up after ya, 'cause gettin' knocked on the head is some better 'n bein' kept hangin' on a hook; but you sure got your nerve with ya. This homestead is purty likely to get in some other folks' way."

Kit had as snappy a pair o' black eyes as was ever stuck in a face; and now they flashed out full power. "I know it 's goin' to be hard to hold this place," sez she, "but I reckon I can help a little. I can ride an' shoot as well as a man, if I have to, and you know it. I don't want anything but the quietest sort of a life the' is; but I 'm ready to stand for any sort o' luck 'at comes along. As for Olaf, he 's the only man in the world for me. I saw something o' the big cities back east, an' Billings, an' the boys on the range here,

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and out of 'em all, Olaf 's my man. The thing I hope more 'n anything else is, that we can die together."

Her voice caused a hush to come to the room. I had meant to be jovial an' hearty; but the' was an undercurrent of earnestness in her voice which put a tingle into a feller. Kit Murray had changed a heap, but all for the better.

Olaf cleared his throat, an' we all took a look at him. He had changed, too. He had lost the chained-bear look he generally wore, an' the' was a light o' pride an' satisfaction in his face which was good to look upon. "Boys," he said, "I 've been purty tough an' unsociable, an' I don't see why you 've took so much trouble for me; but I tell ya right here that I stand ready to square it in any way or at any time I can. Now, it seems mighty funny 'at Kit Murray should love me, an' I can't account for it any more 'n you can; but I knew right from the start that she did love me — I could tell by the light. If ever the time comes that she don't love me any more, I get out of her way, that 's all about that; but I 'm not goin' to make her stay here any longer 'n I have to. I sell out when I get the first chance. Friar Tuck, he softened my heart, an' he watched over her. He 's a man. That 's all I can say."

Well, this was an all-around noble speech for a stone image like Olaf had been, an' we cheered him to the echo; but Horace had sort o' been jostled to the outside an' forgot. Now, he come forward an' shook Olaf by the hand an' congratulated him, an' sez: "The's one thing I 'd like mightily to know, an' that is — what the deuce do you mean by this light you 're allus alludin' to?"

Olaf was some embarrassed; but it never seemed to fuss Horace any when he had turned all the fur the' was in sight

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the wrong way; so he just waited patiently while Olaf spluttered about it.

"I don't know myself," sez Olaf. "Always, since I was a little child, I have seen a floating light about people. I thought every one saw this light an' I spoke of it when I was a child an' asked my mother about it many times; but at first she thought I lie, an' then she thought my head was wrong; so I stopped talkin' about it; but always I see it an' it changes with the feelings and with the health. All the colors and shades I cannot read, but some I know. I knew that Kit Murray loved me before she knew it, and I knew that the Friar was a true man when they told me tales of him. Animals, too, have this floatin' light about 'em, an' I can tell when they are frightened an' when they are mean. This is why I handle hosses without trouble. Now I do not know why my eyes are this way; but I have told you because you have been good friends to me. I do not want you to tell of this because it makes people think I am crazy."

"Course it does," sez Horace. "It made me think you were crazy. I never heard of anything like this before. Tell me some more about it."

"There is no more to tell," sez Olaf. "When I see the flame I do not see the people. The flame wavers about them, and sometimes I have seen it at night, but not often. I do nothing to make myself see this way. Always my eyes did this even when I was only a baby."

"Well, you have everything beat I ever saw yet," sez Horace. "What do you think o' this, Friar?"

"I never heard of such a case," sez the Friar; "although it may have been that many have had this gift to some extent. I think it is due to the peculiar blue of Olaf's eyes. I think that this blue detects colors or rays, not visible to

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ordinary eyes. I wish that some scientist would study them."

"I 'll pay your way back East, Olaf," sez Horace, "if you 'll have your eyes tested."

"No, no," sez Olaf, shakin' his head. "I don't want to be a freak. What is the use? I can not tell how I do it, so it cannot be learned; and I do not want things put into my eyes for experiments. No, I will not do it."

"Tell me how Badger-face looks to you," sez Horace.

"Oh, he is bad," sez Olaf. "He has the hate color, he loves to kill; but he is like the wolf; he does not like the fight, he wants always to kill in secret."

"I bet my eyes are a little like yours," sez Horace, noddin' his head. "I knew 'at Badger-face was this way as soon as I saw him."

"Oh, here now," sez the Friar. "You are puttin' down a special gift to the level of shrewd character-readin'."

"What sort of a flame does a dead person have, Olaf?" sez Horace.

A queer look came into Olaf's face, a half-scared look. "A dead person has no flame," sez he, with a little shudder. "It is a bad sight. I have watched; I have seen the soul leave. When a man is killed, the savage purple color fades into the yellow of fear, then comes the blue, it gets fainter and fainter around the body; but it gathers like a cloud above, and then it is silver gray, like moonshine. It is not in the shape of the body, it is just a cloud. It floats away. That is all."

"Well, that 's enough," sez Horace. "Can you see any flame about a sleeping person?"

"Yes," sez Olaf, "just like about a waking person; and there is marks over a wound or a sick place."

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"Well, Mrs. Svenson," sez Horace to Kit, "you 'll have to be mighty careful or your husband will find you out."

"I am perfectly willin'," sez Kit with a proud little smile. She was game, all right, Kit was.

"That is why I say it is all right," sez Olaf. "She is young, she cannot know how she will change. If ever she no longer love me, I will not bother her. That would be a foolishness; but so long as she love me, no other man will bother her. That would be devilishness!"

"You certainly have a nice, simple scheme of life," sez Horace. "If ever you change your mind, I 'll put up the money to take you back East, an' pay you high wages."

"No," sez Olaf, "I hate circuses an' shows, an' such things. I not go."

"You say you can tell sick places, an' fear, an' hate, an' honesty," sez Horace. "Now, when I came out here, I was just punk all over. You give me a look-over, an' tell right out what you see."

At first Olaf shook his head, but we finally coaxed him into it; an' he opened his eyes wide an' looked at Horace. As he looked the blue in his eyes got deeper an' deeper, like the flowers on the benches in June, then when the pupil was plumb closed, the blue got lighter again, and he said: "You have not one sick point, you have good thoughts, you are very brave, you are too brave — you are reckless. You have very great vitality, an' will live to be very old — unless you get killed. I knew an old Injun — over a hundred years old he was — he had a flame like yours. It is strange."

You could actually see Horace swellin' up with vanity at this; but it made ol' Tank Williams hot to see such a fuss made about a small-caliber cuss; so he rumbles around in his throat a minute, an' sez: "Well, you fellers can fool around

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all night havin' your souls made light of, if ya want to; but as for me I 'm goin' to bed."

Kit insisted that we sleep on the floor just as we had been, while she an' Olaf bunked in the lean-to; but a warm chinook had been blowin' all day, an' it was soft an' pleasant, so we took our beds out in the cottonwoods. Horace an' the Friar got clinched into some kind of a discussion; but the rest of us dropped off about as soon as we stretched out. The moon was just risin', an' one sharp peak covered with glitterin' snow stood up back o' the rim. I remember thinkin' it might be part o' the old earth's shiny soul.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

NIGHT-PROWLERS

WHENEVER the's anything on my mind I sleep purty light; an' the whole Cross brand outfit was on my mind that night; so it 's not surprisin' that I woke up after a bit. The moon had climbed consid'able, an' the stars told me it was about two. I had been sleepin' alone; Horace havin' decided to crawl in with the Friar so they could quarrel at short range.

The Friar's tarp was next to mine, an' I raised myself on my elbow an' looked at it. I could hear him breathin' natural, an' the bulk of him was so large that Horace would n't have made much of a mound anyway; so at first I could n't tell whether he was there or not. I crept out till I could sit up an' get a clear view; but Horace was n't there, so I put on my boots as quick as ever.

I sneaked over to the Friar's tarp; but Horace's hat was gone, so I knew he was up to some mischief, an' started for the corral to see if he had taken a hoss. What I feared was, that he had got to thinkin' about what a super-wonderful flame he had, and had decided to give it a fair work-out by sneakin' down to Ty Jones's on his own hook. I was worried about this because I knew they 'd do for him in a minute, if they 'd catch him where they could hide all traces.

Olaf had built a large square corral an' a smaller round one, to do his ropin' in; and when I reached the near side o' the square one, I heard a slight noise near the gate of the round one. I peered through the poles of the corral, but the

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dividin' fence got in the road so 'at I could n't see, an' I started to prowl around. All of a sudden, Horace's squeaky tenor piped out: "Halt"; an' I flattened out on the ground, thinkin' he had spotted me; but just then the' was a smothered curse from the round corral, an' when I started to get up I saw Badger-face vault over the fence in the direction of Horace's voice.

Then I saw Horace standin' behind a clump with his gun on Badger-face. "Put up your hands," sez Horace.

Badger was runnin' straight for him; but he put up his hands at this order, and came to a slow stop about five feet from Horace. The square corral was still between me an' them, an' I drew my right gun an' started around, keepin' my eye on 'em as much as I could through the poles.

"I reckon I got ya this time," sez Horace, just as I reached the corner.

"I reckon you have," sez Badger in a give-up voice; but at the same moment he took a step forward, threw his body back, an' kicked the gun out of Horace's hand. Then he lunged forward an' got Horace by the throat, flung him on his back an' straddled him — an' I broke for 'em on the run. Just before I reached 'em, the' came a heavy, muffled report, an' Badger-face fell on his side an' rolled over on his back, clutchin' at his breast.

Horace rose to his feet, holdin' a toy pistol, put his hands on his hips, looked down at Badger-face, an' sez: "If you 'd 'a' just asked Olaf what kind of a light I give out, you 'd 'a' stayed at home an' saved your life." That 's how nervous Horace was.

"Don't stand an' talk to a shot man," I sez. "Allus get his gun first."

Horace gave a jump at the sound o' my voice, an' covered

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me with his pop-gun. "Oh, it 's you, is it?" he sez. "Well, then, you get his gun; but I don't much think he can use it."

By the time I had lifted Badger's gun, the other boys were arrivin', an' when they found that Horace had gone out alone an' shot a hole through Badger-face, they certainly was some surprised. Purty soon Kit Murray came out with Olaf, an' then Horace told about not feelin' sleepy an' bein' so disgusted at the way we were snorin' that he had got up to take a little stroll. He said he just went toward the corral 'cause that was the least uninterestin' place he could think of, and that Badger had sneaked down an' started to cut the stirrups off the saddles right before his eyes.

"I gave him all the time he wanted," sez Horace, "so 'at there would n't be any doubt as to his intentions. I reckon 'at cuttin' up saddles in another man's corral is goin' about far enough, ain't it?"

Just then the Friar finished his examination of Badger, an' went after his saddle bags for a bandage. "Went clear through his lung," was all he said as he passed us on the run.

It was purty chilly at that time o' night; and as the cold began to eat in, it suddenly came over Horace that no matter how much justified he was, he had shot an' most likely killed a feller human, an' he began to shake. He went over to Badger-face an' put his coat over him, an' sez: "Great heavens! are ya goin' to let this man lie out here in the cold till he dies? Ain't the' some place we can put him? This is horrible."

"Bring him in the house," sez Kit. "He don't deserve it; but we can't let him lie out here — can we, Olaf?"

"No," sez Olaf. "If you say bring him in, in he comes."

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"That 's right, that 's fine. I don't bear him any malice," sez Horace. "I hope he gets over it an' lives to repent."

We packed him into the house an' Kit made a fire an' heated some water. As soon as the water was hot, the Friar cleaned out the wound with it an' some foamy stuff out of a bottle. Then he dissolved a drab tablet in some water an' tied up both openings. Horace sat in a corner durin' this operation, with his head in his hands, shiverin'. The reaction had set in; an' all of us knew what it was, though I don't suppose any of us had had the chance to give way to it as free as Horace did.

Badger-face was all cut an' scarred when we stripped him; but he looked as tough an' gnarly as an oak tree, an' the Friar said he had one chance in a hundred to pull through. He did n't speak to us until after the Friar had finished with him. Then he said in a low, snarly voice: "I don't much expect to get over this; but before I slip off, I wish you 'd tell me who the little cuss who got me really is, an' what 's his game."

We did n't hardly know what to say; but finally Tank sez: "We don't feel free to tell you who he is, Badger-face; but I 'll say this much, he ain't no officer of the law."

I thought it would be the quickest way to straighten Horace up, so I told him 'at Badger-face wanted to talk to him. Sure enough, Horace took a deep breath an' stiffened his upper lip. Then he walked over to the bed. "How do ya feel, Badger-face?" sez he.

"Oh, I been shot before," sez Badger; "but it burns worse 'n usual this time, an' I reckon you 've got me. It grinds me all up to think 'at a little runt like you did it, an' it would soothe me to know 'at you had some sort of a record."

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Horace looked thoughtful: he wanted to comfort the man he was responsible for havin' put out o' the game; but he could see that the whole truth would n't in no wise do, so he put on a foxy look an' sez: "I never worked around these parts none; but if you 've ever heard o' Dinky Bradford, why, that 's me. I know just how you feel. You feel as much put out at bein' bested by a small-like man, as I would at havin' a big feller get ahead o' me; but you need n't fret yourself. There 's fellers right in this room who have seen me go four days without food an' then do a stunt which beat anything they 'd ever seen. Don't you worry none. Now that you 're down an' out, we all wish ya the best o' luck."

Me an' Spider an' Tank had to grin at this; but it was just what Badger needed to quiet him, an' his face lit up when he asked Horace how he had managed to shoot him.

"I used my auxilary armyment," sez Horace, but that 's all the explanation he 'd make. I found out afterward that he had a thing called a derringer, a two-barreled pistol, forty-one caliber, which he carried in his vest pocket. I told him 'at this sneaky sort of a weapon would give him a bad name if it was found out on him; but he said 'at he shot from necessity, not choice, and that when it came to gettin' shot, he could n't see why the victim should be so blame particular what was used — which is sensible enough when you come to think it over, though I would n't pack one o' those guns, myself.

Badger-face was out of his head next day, and for two weeks followin'. The Friar an' Kit an' Horace took turns nursin' him, an' they did an able job of it. Water, plain water an' wind, was about all the Friar used in treatin' him. Kit wanted to give him soup an' other sorts o' funnel food; but the Friar said 'at a man could live for weeks on what

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was stored up in him; an' Horace backed him up. Kit used to shake her head at this, an' I know mighty well that down deep in her heart, she thought they would starve him to death before her very eyes.

We tore up the old shack on the hill, snaked the poles down with Olaf's work team, an' set it up in the Spread; so 'at we 'd be handy in case we was needed. A couple o' the Cross-branders drifted by, an' we gave 'em the news about Badger-face an' Dinky Bradford havin' come together an' Badger havin' got some the worst of it; but they would n't go in to see him, an' they quit wanderin' by; so 'at we did n't hardly know what to expect.

We had hard work thawin' out the clay for chinkin', an' we did n't get the cabin as tight as we 'd 'a' liked; but we had plenty o' wood, so it did n't much matter as far as warmth was concerned; but we had the blamedest time with a pack-rat I ever did have.

I don't know whether pack-rats an' trade-rats is the same varmints or not; but neither one of 'em has a grain o' sense, though some tries to stick up for the trade-rats on account o' their tryin' to be honest. A pack-rat is about three times as big as a barn rat, an' fifteen times as energetic. His main delight is to move things. Horace said 'at he was convinced they were the souls o' furniture-movers who had died without repentin' of all the piano-lamps an' chiny-ware they had broke. A pack-rat don't care a peg whether he can use an article or not; all he asks is the privilege of totin' it about somewhere.

We were n't at all sure 'at we would n't be routed out in the night; so when we went to sleep, we 'd stack our boots an' hats where we could find 'em easy. Sometimes the pack-rat would toil so industrious 'at he 'd wake us up an' we 'd

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try to hive him; but most o' the time he 'd work sly, an' then next mornin' we 'd find our boots all in a heap on the table, or in the corner under the bunk or somewhere clear outside the shack; until we was tempted to move the shack back where it was, there not bein' any pack-rats up there.

Then either the pack-rat reformed into a trade-rat, or else he sold out his claim to a trade-rat. Anyway, four nights after we 'd been settled, we began to get trades for our stuff.

Horace was sleepin' this whole night with us, an' next mornin' he wakened before light an' started to dress so as to relieve the Friar. He had put his boots on the floor under the head o' his bunk, an' when he reached down for 'em he found one potato an' the hide of a rabbit. The rabbit hide had been tossed out two days before, an' it had froze stiff an' had a most ungainly feel at that hour o' the mornin'. Horace scrooged back into bed an' pulled all the covers off Tank whom he was sleepin' with. When Tank awoke, he found Horace sittin' up in the bunk with the covers wound around him, yellin' for some one to strike a light.

We all struck matches an' finally got a candle lit. When Horace saw what it was, he was hos-tile for true, thinkin' it was a joke one o' the boys had put up. We had had a hard time convincin' him o' the ways o' pack-rats, an' now when we sprung trade-rats on him, he thought we were liars without mercy; but when the Friar came out to learn what the riot was, an' told Horace it was all so about trade-rats, he had to give in.

"Well, they 've got a heap o' nerve," sez he, from the center o' the beddin' which was still wound around him, "to lug off a good pair o' high-heeled ridin' boots, an' leave an old potato an' the shuck of a rabbit in place of 'em!"

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After this Horace took a tarp into Badger's room an' bedded himself down in a corner, which was all around the most handy thing he could do; but the rest of us had a regular pest of a time with that rat. We could n't find out where the deuce he got in; but he distributed our belongin's constant, an' generally brought us some of Olaf's grub-stuff in exchange. We could n't trap him nor bluff him, an' it generally took a good hour mornin's, to round up our wearin' apparel.

One night we kept the fire goin' an' changed watchers every two hours. Ol' Tank was on guard from two to four, an' he woke us up by takin' a shot. We found him on his back in the middle o' the floor, an' he claimed he had been settin' in a chair an' had seen the rat walkin' along the lower side o' the ridgepole with one o' Tillte Dutch's boots in his mouth. Dutch had the spreadin'est feet in the outfit, an' we could n't believe 'at a trade-rat could possibly tote it, hangin' down from the ridgepole; but Tank showed us a lot o' scratches along the ridgepole, an' a bruise on his chin where the boot had hit him when the rat dropped it. The' was also a hole in the boot where his bullet had gone, but this did n't prove anything. Still, Tank stuck to his story, so we had to apologize for accusin' him of lettin' his good eye sleep while he kept watch with his free one.

We stuffed burlap into the hole about the ridgepole, an' that night bein' Christmas eve, we all gathered in and held festivities. We danced an' told tales an' sang until a late hour. None of us were instrument musicians; but we clapped our hands an' patted with our feet, an' Kit took turns dancin' with us, till it was most like a regular party. Mexican Slim bet that he could do a Spanish dance as long as Horace could sing different verses of his song; but we sup-

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pressed it at the ninety-first verse. Tank wanted to let him finish, in the hope it might kill the trade-rat; but we could n't stand any more, ourselves.

Then the Friar taught us a song called, " We three Kings of Orient are "; an' we disbursed for the night. It was a gorgeous night, an' me an' the Friar took a little walk under the stars. One of 'em rested just above the glisteny peak up back o' the rim, an' he sang soft an' low, the " Star of beauty, star of night " part o' this song. He allus lifted me off the earth when he sang this way. Then he sez to me: " After all, Happy, life pays big dividends, if we just live it hard enough "; an' he gave a little sigh an' went in to tend to Badger-face.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE TRADE-RAT'S CHRISTMAS-GIFT

TRADE-RATS have n't as much idee of real music as coyotes have. Ninety-one verses of that infernal cow-song, sung in Horace's nose-tenor, was enough to drive bed-bugs out of a lumber-camp; but that night the trade-rat worked harder than ever. We had hid our stuff an' fastened it down, an' used every sort of legitimate means to circumvent the cuss; but he beat us to it every time, an' switched our stuff around scandalous."

"Merry Christmas!" yelled Spider Kelley, holdin' up a rusty sardine can.

The trade-rat had remembered us all in some the same way, but we recalled what day it was an' took it in good part; until, all of a sudden, ol' Tank gave a whoop, an' held up a brown buck-skin bag. We crowded around an' wanted him to open it up an' see what was inside; but he said it most probably belonged to Olaf or Kit or the Friar; so we toted it into the cabin' an' asked the one who could identify it to step out an' claim his diamonds.

Then we had a surprise — not one o' the bunch could identify the bag! We stood around an' looked at the bag for as much as five minutes, tryin' to figure out how the deuce even a trade-rat could spring stuff on us none of us had ever seen before.

"This is a real trade, sure enough," sez Horace.

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"I tell ya what this is," sez I. "This is a Christmas-gift for the Friar. Go on an' open it, Friar."

The' was some soft, Injun-tanned fawn-skin inside, wrappin' up a couple o' papers, an' two photographs, and an old faded letter. "I don't think we have the right to look at these," sez the Friar.

"How 'll we ever find out who they belong to, then?" asked Horace. "Look at the letter anyway."

It was in a blank envelope, an' it began, "My dear son," and ended, "Your lovin' mother." The letter was just the same as all mothers write to their sons, I reckon: full of heartache, an' tenderness, an' good advice, an' scoldin'; but nothin' to identify nobody by; so we said 'at the Friar should read the papers. One of 'em was an honorable discharge from the army; but all the names an' dates an' localities had been crossed out. It was what they call an "Excellent" discharge, which is the best they give, an' you could tell by the thumb print 'at this part had been read the most by whoever had treasured it.

The other paper was simply a clippin' from a newspaper. It was a column of items tellin' about Dovey wishin' to see Tan Shoes at the same place next Sunday, an' such things. The Friar said 'at this was the personal column, an' he sure labeled it; 'cause if a feller chose to guess any, some o' those items was personal enough to make a bar-tender blush; but they did n't convey any news to us as to where the trade-rat had procured the buck-skin bag.

The photographs were wrapped in tissue paper an' then tied together with pink string, face to each. The Friar balked a little at openin' 'em up; but we deviled him into it. The first he opened was a cheap, faded little one of an old lady. She had a sad, patient face, an' white hair. Horace

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was standin' on a chair, lookin' over the Friar's shoulder, an' he piped out that the photograph had been took in New York, an' asked if we knew any one who lived there, which most of us did; but not the subject of the photograph.

Then the Friar opened the other one. He took one look at it, an' then his face turned gray. "This one was took in Rome," sez Horace. "Does any one here have a list o' friends livin' in Rome, Italy?"

He had n't looked at the face on the photograph, nor at the Friar's face; but when we did n't answer, he looked up, saw that we had sobered in sympathy with the Friar, an' then he looked at the face on the photograph an' got down off the chair. The face was of a beautiful lady in a low-necked, short-sleeved dress. Not as low nor as short as some dresses I 've seen in pictures, but still a purty generous outlook.

The Friar's hands shook some; but he gradually got a grip on himself, an' purty soon, he sez in a steady voice: "This is a picture of Signorina Morrissena. Does any one here know of her?"

Well, of course none of us had ever heard of her; so the Friar wrapped up the package again an' put it back into the buck-skin bag. We had expected to have some high jinks that day, an' Kit had baked a lot o' vinegar pies for dinner, we had plenty o' fresh deer-meat, an' we had agreed to let the Friar hold a regular preachin' first; but when we saw how the picture had shook him up we drifted back to our own shack an' sat talkin' about where the deuce that blame trade-rat could possibly have got a holt o' the buck-skin bag. I was purty sure that it was a picture o' the Friar's girl, the extra trimmin's on the name not bein' much in the way of a disguise, an' as soon as I got a chance to see Horace

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I questioned him, an' he said it was the girl, all right; but that she had developed a lot.

The Friar had taken a hoss an' gone up into the mountains, an' had left word that he did n't want any dinner. We were as full o' sympathy with him as we could stand, but not in the mood to sidestep such a meal as Kit had framed up; so we ate till after three in the afternoon. We did n't want to do anything to fret him a speck; so we hardly knew what to do. Generally it tickled him to have us ask him to preach to us; but we could n't tell how he 'd feel about it now, and we were still discussin' it about the fire when the Friar came back.

He looked mighty weary, an' we knew he had been drivin' himself purty hard, although it was n't just tiredness which showed in his face. Still, the' was a sort of peace there, too; so after he 'd warmed himself a while, ol' Tank asked him if he would n't like to preach to us a bit.

The Friar once said that back East some folks used good manners as clothin' for their souls, but that out our way good-heartedness was the clothin', an' good manners nothin' more than a silver band around the hat. "And some o' the bands are mighty narrow, Friar," I added to draw him out. "Yes," sez he, "but the hats are mighty broad."

You just could n't floor the Friar in a case like this. He knew 'at the politeness an' the good-heartedness in Tank's request was divided off about the same as the band an' the hat; and that all we wanted was to ease off the Friar's mind an' let him feel contented; so he heaved a sigh and shook his head at Tank.

When a blacksmith goes out into company, folks don't pester him with questions as to why tempered steel was n't stored up in handy caves, instead of havin' nothin' but rough

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ore hid away in the cellar of a mountain; and a carpenter is not held responsible because a sharp saw cuts better 'n a dull one; but it seems about next to impossible for a human bein' to pass up a parson without insultin' him a little about the ways o' Providence, and askin' him a lot o' questions which would moult feathers out o' the ruggedest angel in the bunch.

We could all see 'at the Friar had been havin' a rough day of it; so Tank began by askin' him questions simply to toll him away from himself; but soon he was shootin' questions into the Friar as rough shod as though they was both strangers to each other.

"You say it was sheep-herders what saw the angels that night the Lord was born," sez Tank. "How come the' was n't any cow-punchers saw 'em?" Tank had about the deep-rootedest prejudice again' sheep-herders I ever saw.

"The' was n't any cow-punchers in that land," sez the Friar. "It was a hilly land an'—"

"Well I 'd like to know," broke in ol' Tank, "why the Lord picked out such a place as that, when he had the whole world to choose from."

O' course the Friar tried his best to smooth this out; but by the time he was through, Tank had got tangled up with another perdicament. "Then, there was ol' Faro's dream," he said, "the one about the seven lean cows eatin' the seven fat ones. I 've punched cows all my life, and I saw 'em so thin once, when the snow got crusted an' the chinook got switched off for a month, that the spikes on their backbones punched holes through their hides; but they 'd as soon thought o' flyin' up an' grazin' on clouds, as to turn in an' eat one another."

By the time the Friar had got through explainin' the dif-

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ference between dreams and written history, Tank was ready with another query. "I heard tell once 'at the Bible sez, 'If thy eye offends thee, pluck it out.' Does the Bible say this?"

"Well, it does," admitted the Friar; "but you see —"

"Well, my free eye offends me," broke in Tank. "It never did offend me until Spike Groogan tried to pluck it out, and it don't offend me now as much as it does other folks. Still, I got to own up 'at the blame thing does offend me whenever I meet up with strangers, 'cause it allus runs wilder in front of a stranger 'n at airy other time. Now, what I want to know is, why an' when an' how must I pluck out that eye — specially, when it sez in another place that if a man's eye is single his whole body is full o' light. My eye is single enough to suit any one. Fact is, it 's so blame single that some folks call it singular; but the' ain't no more light in my body 'n there is in airy other man's."

You could n't work off any spiritual interpretation stuff on Tank. He thought an allegory was the varmint which lives in the Florida swamps. Well, as far as that goes, I did, too, until the Friar pointed out that it was merely a falsehood used to explain the truth; but Tank, he did n't join in with any new-fangled notions, an' a feller had to talk to him as straight out as though talkin' to a hoss. The' was lots of times I did n't envy the Friar his job.

But after he had satisfied Tank that it was n't required of him to discard either of his lamps, especially the free one, he drifted off into tellin' us how he had spent the day — and then I envied him a little, for he certainly did have the gift o' wranglin' words.

He told about havin' rode up the mountain as far as he could go, and then climbin' as far as he could on foot. He showed how hard it was to tell either a man or a mountain

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by the lines in their faces, and he went on with this till he made a mountain almost human. Then he switched around and showed how much a mountain was like life, ambition bein' like pickin' out the mountain, the easy little foothills bein' the start, the summit allus hid while a feller was climbin', and each little plateau urgin' him to give up there and rest. He compared life and a mountain, until it seemed that all a feller needed for a full edication, was just to have a mountain handy. Then he wound up by sayin' that he had n't been able to reach the peak. He had sat in a sheltered nook for a time, gazin' up at the face of a cliff with an overhangin' bank o' snow on top, the wind swirlin' masses o' snow down about him, and everything tryin' to point out that he had been a failure, and might as well give up in disgust. He stopped here, and we were all silent, for, as was usual with him, he had led us along to where we could see life through his eyes for a space.

"After a time," sez the Friar as soon as he saw we were in the right mood, "I caught my breath again and followed the narrow ledge I was on around to where I could see the highest peak stand out clear and solitary; and from my side of it, it was n't possible for any man to reach it. There was no wind here, the air was as sweet and pure as at the dawn o' creation, and everywhere I looked I met glory heaped on glory. A gray cloud rested again' the far side o' the peak, and back o' this was the sun. Ah, there was a silver and a golden linin' both to this cloud; and all of a sudden I was comforted.

"I had done all I could do, and this was my highest peak. Whatever was the highest peak for others, this was the highest peak for me; and there was no more bitterness or envy or doubt or fear in my heart. I stood for a long time

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lookin' up at the gray cloud with its dazzling edges, and some very beautiful lines crept into my memory — 'The paths which are trod, by only the evenin' and mornin', and the feet of the angels of God.'"

The Friar had let himself out a little at the end, and his eyes were shinin' when he finished. "I guess I have given you a sermon, after all, boys," he said, "and I hope you can use it to as good advantage as I did when it came to me up on the mountain. We all have thoughts we can't put into words, and so I 've failed to give you all 'at was given me; but it 's some comfort to know that, be they big or be they little, we don't have to climb any mountains but our own, and whether we reach the top or whether we come to a blind wall first, the main thing is to climb with all our might and with a certain faith that those who have earned rest shall find it, after the sun has set."

This was one of the days when the magic of the Friar's voice did strange things to a feller's insides. We knew 'at he was talkin' in parables, an' talkin' mostly to himself; but each one of us knew our own little mountains, an' it was darn comfortin' to understand that the Friar could have as tough a time on his as we had on ours.

We all sat silent, each feller thinkin' over his own problems; and after a time, the Friar sang the one beginnin', "O little town of Bethlehem!" It was dark by this time, but the firelight fell on his face, an' made it so soft-like an' tender that ol' Tank Williams sniffled audible once, an' when the song was finished he piled a lot more wood on the fire, an' pertended 'at he was catchin' cold. When Kit called us in to supper, we all sat still for a full minute, before we could get back to our appetites again.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A CONTESTED LIFE-TITLE

THE bullet which had gone through Badger-face had n't touched a single bone. It had gone through his left lung purty high up, but somethin' like the pneumonie set in, an' he was a sorry lookin' sight when the fever started to die out after havin' hung on for two weeks. He had been drinkin' consid'able beforehand, which made it bad for him, an' the Friar said it was all a question of reserve. If Badger-face had enough of his constitution left to tide him over, he stood a good chance; but otherwise it was his turn.

He did n't have much blood left in him at the end of two weeks on air and water, and he did n't have enough fat to pillow his bones on. We all thought 'at he ought to have something in the way o' feed; but the Friar would n't stand for one single thing except water. He said 'at food had killed a heap more wounded men 'n bullets ever had; so we let him engineer it through in his own way.

When the fever started to leave, he got so weak 'at Horace thought he was goin' to flicker out, an' he felt purty bad about it. He did n't regret havin' done it, an' said he would do just the same if he had it to do over; but it calls up some mighty serious thoughts when a fellow reflects that he is the one who has pushed another off into the dark. On the night when it seemed certain that Badger-face would lose his grip, we all went into his room an' sat around waitin' for the end, to sort o' cheer him up a little. Life itself

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is a strange enough adventure, but death has it beat a mile.

Along about nine o'clock, Badger said in a low, trembly voice: "What 'd you fellers do to me, if I got well?"

He did n't even open his eyes; so we did n't pay any heed to him. When he first got out of his head, he had rambled consid'able. Part o' the time he seemed to be excusin' himself for what he had done, an' part o' the time he seemed to be gloatin' over his devilment; but the' was n't any thread to his discourse so we did n't set much store by it. After waitin' a few minutes, he quavered out his question again, an' the Friar told him not to worry about anything, but just to set his mind on gettin' well.

Badger shook his head feebly from side to side an' mumbled, "That don't go, that don't go with me." He paused here for a rest, an' then went on. "I 've been in my right mind all day, an' I 've been thinkin' a lot, an' tryin' some experiments. I can breathe in a certain way which makes me easier an' stronger, an' I can breathe in another way which shuts off my heart. I don't intend to get well merely for the pleasure o' gettin' lynched; so if that 's your game, I intend to shut off my heart an' quit before I get back the flavor o' life. It don't make two-bits difference with me either way. What d' ya intend to do?"

He had been a long time sayin' this, an' we had exchanged glances purty promiscuous. We had n't give a thought as to what we would do with him, providin' he responded to our efforts to save his life; but it was purty generally understood that Badger had fitted himself to be strung up, just the same as if he had n't been shot at all. Now, though, when we came to consider it, this hardly seemed a square deal. There was n't much common sense in chokin' a man's life

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down his throat for two weeks, only to jerk it out again at the end of a rope, an' we found ourselves in somethin' of a complication.

"What do ya think we ort to do to ya?" asked Tank.

"Lynch me," sez Badger, without openin' his eyes; "but I don't intend to wait for it. I don't blame ya none, fellers. I did ya all the dirt I could; but I don't intend to furnish ya with no circus performance — I 'm goin' on."

He began to breathe different, an' his face began to get purplish an' ghastly. "Can he kill himself that way?" I asked the Friar.

"I don't know," sez the Friar. "I think 'at when he loses consciousness, nature 'll take holt, an' make him breathe the most comfortable way — but I don't know."

"Let Olaf take a look at his flame," sez Horace; so Olaf looked at Badger a long time.

Olaf had n't wasted much of his time on Badger. He was n't long on forgiveness, Olaf was n't; an' ever since the time 'at Badger had been so enthusiastic in tryin' to have him lynched for killin' Bud Fisher, Olaf had give it out as his opinion that Badger was doomed for hell, an' he was n't disposed to take any hand in postponin' his departure. Olaf was the matter-o'-factest feller I ever knew. The' don't seem to be much harm in most of our cussin', but when Olaf indulged in profanity, he was solemn an' earnest, the same as if he was sayin' a prayer backwards.

"It don't look like Badger's flame," sez he after a time. "It 's gettin' mighty weak an' blue, an' the's a thick spot over his heart which shows plainer 'n the one over his wound."

"I move we give him a fresh start," sez Horace.

"He 'd ort to be lynched," sez Tank. "I don't see why we can't try him out now, an' if we find him guilty, why he

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can kill himself if he wants to, or else get well again an' we 'll do it for him."

Neither what Horace said nor what Tank said called out much response. We knew the' was n't any one could say a good word for Badger-face an' so he well deserved his stretchin'; but on the other hand, there he was turnin' gray before our eyes, an' it went again' our nature to discard him, after havin' hung on to him for two weeks. The Friar left the side of the bed an' retired into a corner, leavin' us free to express ourselves.

"I don't see how we can let him go free," sez Tank. "He sez himself 'at he ort to be lynched; an' when a feller can't speak a good word for himself, I don't see who can."

"Badger-face," sez Horace, "you 're the darnedest bother of a man I ever saw. First you infest us until we have to shoot a hole through you, an' then we have to nurse you for two weeks, an' now you 're diggin' your heels into our consciences. I give you my word we won't lynch you if you get well. We 'll turn you over to the law."

Badger's thin lips fell back over his yellow teeth in the ghastliest grin a live man ever hung out. "The law," sez he with bitter sarcasm, "the law! Have you ever been in a penitentiary?"

"No," sez Horace, "I have not."

"Well, I have," sez Badger. "I was put in for another feller's deed; an' they gave me the solitary, the jacket, the bull-rings, the water-cure, and if you 'll roll me over after I 'm dead, you can still see the scars of the whip on my back. I 've tried the law, an' I 'll see you all damned before I try it again."

Badger-face was as game as they generally get. As soon as he stopped talkin' he began to breathe against his heart

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again. Horace stood lookin' at him for a full minute, an' then he lost his temper.

"You 're a coward, that 's what you are!" sez Horace. "I said all along 'at you were a coward, an' another feller said so too, an' now you 're provin' it. You can sneak an' kill cows an' cut saddles in the dark, but you have n't the nerve to face things in the open. Now, you 're sneakin' off into the darkness o' death because you 're afraid to face the light of life."

This was handin' it to him purty undiluted, an' Badger opened his eyes an' looked at Horace. His eyes were heavy an' dull, but they did n't waver any. "Dinky," sez Badger-face, "the only thing I got again' you is your size. I 've been called a lot o' different things in my time; but you 're the first gazabo 'at ever called me a coward — an' you 're about the only one who has a right to, 'cause you put me out fair an' square. I wish you had traveled my path alongside o' me, though. You ain't no milksop, but after you 'd been given a few o' the deals I 've had, you 'd take to the dark too. You can call me a coward if you want to, or, after I 'm gone, you can think of me as just bein' dog tired an' glad o' the chance to crawl off into the dark to sleep. I don't want to be on your conscience; that 's not my game. All I want is just to get shut o' the whole blame business."

He talked broken an' quavery, an' it took him a long time to finish; but when he did quit, he turned on his bad breathin' again. Horace had flushed up some when Badger had mentioned milksop; but when he had finished, Horace took his wasted hand in a hearty grip, an' sez: "I take it back, Badger. You ain't no coward. I only wanted to taunt you into stickin' for another round; but I think mighty well o' ya. Will you agree to cut loose from the Ty Jones

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crowd an' try to be a man, if we give you your freedom, a new outfit, and enough money to carry you out of the country?"

It was some time before Badger spoke, an' then he said: "Nope, I can't do it. Ty knows my record, an' he 's treated me white; but if I quit him, he 'll get me when I least expect it. Now understand, Dinky, that I don't hold a thing again' you, you 're the squarest feller I 've ever met up with; but I 'm not comin' back to life again. From where I am now, I can see it purty plain, an' it ain't worth the trouble."

"You could write back to Ty that you made your escape from us," sez Horace.

"That 's the best idee you 've put over," sez Badger, after he 'd thought it out; "but I have n't enough taste for life to make the experiment. Don't fuss about me any more. I don't suffer a mite. I feel just like a feller in the Injun country, goin' to sleep on post after days in the saddle. He knows it 'll mean death, but he 's too tired out to care a white bean."

"Have you ever been in the army?" asked the Friar from his place in the corner. We all gave a little start at the sound of his voice, for it came with a snap an' unexpected.

Badger's lips dropped back for another hideous grin. "Yes," he said, "I 've been in both the penitentiary and the army — and they 're a likely pair."

"Did you have a buck-skin bag?" asked the Friar, comin' up to the bed.

Badger-face tried to raise himself on his elbow, but he could n't quite make it. "Yes, I did," sez he, droppin' back again. "What became of it?"

"I am keepin' it for ya," sez the Friar. "Do you wish to leave any word in case you do not recover?"

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"No," sez Badger, "the' ain't no one to leave word to. That letter was from my mother, an' that was her picture. She 's been dead a long string o' years now."

"There was another picture an' a newspaper clippin'," sez the Friar.

Badger-face did n't give no heed; an' after a time the Friar sez: "What shall I do with them?"

"Throw 'em away," sez Badger-face. "They don't concern me none. I was more took with that woman's picture 'n airy other I ever saw. That was all."

"Where did you get it?" asked the Friar.

"I got it from a young Dutchy," sez Badger wearily. "He killed a feller over at Leadville an' came out here an' took on with Ty Jones. He said she was an opery singer, an' got drugged at a hotel where he was workin'."

Badger-face was gettin' purty weak by now, an' he stopped with a sort of sigh. The Friar took holt of his hand. "I am very much interested in this woman," he said, lookin' into Badger's face as if tryin' to give him life enough to go on with. "Can you tell me anything else about her?"

"Not much," sez Badger-face. "She was singin' at what he called the Winter Garden at Berlin, Germany. Some Austrian nobility got mashed on her an' drugged her at the hotel. Dutchy was mashed on her, too, I reckon. They had advertised for him in a New York paper, an' when he got shot, over at Little Monte's dance hall, he asked me to write about it. His mother had died leavin' property, an' all they wanted was to round up the heirs. I reckon they were glad enough to have Dutchy scratched from the list. I don't know why I did keep that clippin'."

"Have you any idee how long ago it was 'at the woman was drugged?" asked the Friar.

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"I have n't any idee," sez Badger-face weakly. "Carl was killed four years ago this Christmas eve; so it had to be before that."

"Listen to me, Badger-face," sez the Friar, grippin' his hand tight. "I want you to get well. I know that all these men will stand by you and help you to start a new life."

"How long is it since I 've been laid up?" asked Badger.

"Two weeks," sez the Friar. "This is two days after Christmas."

"Who tended to me?" asked Badger.

"We all did," sez the Friar, "and we all stand ready to help you make a new start."

"I had a good enough start," sez Badger; "but I fooled it away, an' I 'm too old now to make a new one."

"Is there any word you want sent to your friends at Ty Jones's?" asked the Friar.

Once more Badger skinned his face into the grin. "Friends?" sez he. "When you trap a wolf, does he send any word to his friends? I have n't got no friends."

"Swallow this milk," sez Horace holdin' some of it out to him in a big spoon. Kit had made Olaf start to milkin' a cow, 'cause she wanted to use milk in cookin', and intended to make butter when she had the cream saved up. Badger put the milk in his mouth, an' then spit it out again.

"Don't you put anything else in my mouth," he sez. "I told you I was goin' to die; an' by blank, I am goin' to die."

"Fellers," sez Horace, turnin' to us, "do you think this man is goin' to die?" We all nodded our heads. "Then, will you give his life to me, to do with as I will?" asked Horace; and we nodded our heads again.

Horace took off his coat, an' rolled up his sleeves, an'

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then he came over an' shook Badger-face by the shoulder. "Listen to me," he sez. "I fought ya once before, for your life, and I 'm goin' to fight you for it now. Do you hear what I say — I 'm goin' to fight you for your own life. I 'm goin' to make you swallow milk, if I have to tie you an' pour it in through a funnel. You can't hold your breath an' fight, an' I 'm goin' to fight you."

Badger-face opened his eyes an' looked up into Horace's face. He looked a long time, an' the ghost of a smile crept into his face. "Well, you 're the doggonedest little cuss I ever saw!" he exclaimed. He waited a long time, an' then set his teeth. "You beat me once," he muttered. "Now, see if you can beat me again."

It was after midnight; so when Horace dropped the hint that he would n't need any help except from me an' the Friar, the rest o' the boys dug out for the bunk shack. Then Horace took us over to the fireplace an' asked us what was the best thing to do.

"I do believe 'at you have stumbled on the right plan to save him," sez the Friar. "He has no fever, the wound is doin' splendid, and he has a powerful constitution. The trouble is that he does not will to live. We must spur on his will, and if we can make him fight back, this 'll help. Also we must control him as much as possible through suggestion. Have you any plan o' your own?"

"No," sez Horace candidly. Horace did n't need anything for any emergency except his own nerve. "I am determined that he must live, but I have no plan."

"The first thing is to give him a little warm milk," sez the Friar.

"All right," sez Horace. "You tell me what to do — by signs, as much as possible — but let me give the orders

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to Badger-face. My size has made an impression on him, and we can't afford to lose a single trick." The Friar agreed to this an' we went back to the bunk.

"Badger-face," sez Horace, "I'd rather give you this milk peaceful; but I'm goin' to give it to ya, an' you can bet what ya like on that."

Badger opened his eyes again, an' they were dull an' glazy. "This reminds me o' the water-cure at the pen," he said, an' then set his teeth.

"Hold his hands, Happy," sez Horace, as full o' fight as a snow-plow. "Hold his head, Friar. Now then, swallow or drown."

It looked purty inhuman, but Badger had to swallow after a bit, an' when we had put as much milk into him as we wanted — only a couple o' spoonfuls — we let him go, an' he fell asleep, pantin' a little. We woke him up in half an hour, an' put some more milk into him. When he slept, his breathin' was more like natural, an' the fourth time, I didn't have to hold his hands; so I went to sleep myself.

Well, Horace won this fight, too. In about four days, Badger-face began to have an appetite, an' then it was all off with him. He couldn't have died if we'd left him plumb alone; but he hadn't give up yet. The Friar kept him down to a mighty infan-tile diet, sayin' that a lung shot was a bad one, an' the pure mountain air was all that had saved him; but even now fever was likely to come back on him.

It was close to the tenth o' January when Horace came in from a ride one evenin', an' went in to see Badger-face, still wearin' his gun. Quick as a wink, Badger grabbed the gun; but Horace threw himself on Badger's arm, an'

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yelled for help. The Friar an' Olaf rushed in from the lean-to, an' corraled the gun in short order.

"You blame little bob-cat, you!" sez Badger. "I did n't intend to use the gun on you."

"I know what you intended to do," sez Horace; "but you don't win this deal as easy as all that."

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A STRANGE ALLIANCE

AFTER this we tied Badger-face in bed an' kept watch of him. He kept on gettin' stronger all the time, an' a good percent of his meanness came back with his strength. Sometimes he 'd spend hours tauntin' Horace an' the Friar; but they did n't mind it any more 'n if Badger had been a caged beast. Then one night he concluded to try cussin'. He started in to devise somethin' extra fancy in the way o' high-colored profanity; but he had n't gone very far on this path, before Olaf came in as black as a thunder cloud.

"Do you want to be whipped with a whip?" he demanded.

"Naw, I don't want to be whipped with a whip," sez Badger-face.

"Then you stop swearin'," sez Olaf. "We been to enough trouble about you, and I don't intend to have my wife listen to any more o' your swearin'. If you don't stop it, I whip all your skin off. You say you want to die — I whip you to death before your very eyes."

Badger heaved at his ropes a time or two, an' then he realized his weakness, sank back on the bed, an' the tears rolled down his cheeks. He fair sobbed. "You 're a set o' cowards," he yelled, "the whole pack o' you! You would n't let me die, and now you threaten to whip me to death. I dare any one of ya to shoot me — you yellow-hearted cowards!"

"I care not for what you say I am," said Olaf. "You

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know if I am a coward, and you know if I keep my word. I say to you, slow an' careful, that if you yell swear words again in my house, I whip your hide off."

Well, this had a quietin' influence on Badger's conversation; but he fretted himself a good deal as to what we intended to do with him. Finally one day when he began to look a little more like a live man than a skeleton, Horace sez to him: "Badger, you said you did n't have any friends, an' it must be true, 'cause not one of your own outfit has ever been to see you, not even Ty Jones."

"Ty Jones don't stay out here through the winter," sez Badger-face. "If he 'd been here, he 'd have squared things up for this, one way or another."

"Where does he go?" asked Horace.

"I don't know," sez Badger-face.

Horace asked Olaf about it, and Olaf said 'at Ty Jones allus pulled out in December, an' did n't come back until March.

Then Horace came in and sat by Badger again. "I 've got a proposition to make to you," sez he, "and you think it over before you answer. I have plenty o' money; but I 've wasted most o' my life, sittin' down. If you are sick of livin' like a wolf, I 'll pay your expenses and half again as much as Ty Jones is payin' you, and all you 'll have to agree to is to go along as a sort of handy-man for me. I think we can get to be purty good friends, but that can wait. I intend to ramble around wherever my notions take me. If you 'll give your word to be as decent as you can, I 'll give my word to stand by you as far as I 'm able. Your life is forfeit to me, an' if you 'll do your part, I intend to make the balance of it worth while to ya. Now, don't answer me; but think it over an' ask all the questions you want to. I 'll

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answer true what I do answer; but I won't answer any 'at I don't want to."

If Horace had crept in an' cut off his two ears, Badger would n't have been any more surprised. Well, none of us would, as far as that goes; though why we should let anything 'at Horace chose to do surprise us by this time is more 'n I know.

He an' Badger talked it over complete for several days, Horace agreein' that he would n't ask Badger to go anywhere the army or the law was likely to get him an' not to make him do any stunts 'at would make him look foolish. He told Horace 'at he had served one enlistment an' got a top-notch discharge, an' had then took on again; but a drunken officer had him tied on a spare artillery wheel because Badger had laughed when the officer had fallen off his horse into a mud-puddle. He said they had laid the wheel on the ground and him across it, the small of his back restin' on the hub o' the wheel, an' his arms an' legs spread an' tied to the rim, an' had kept him there ten hours. He said that he had deserted the first chance he got; but he refused to tell what had happened to the officer afterward.

Finally Badger said he would take up Horace's proposition; an' Horace called Olaf in to see if Badger was speakin' true. This was the first Badger had ever heard about Olaf's eyes seein' soul-flames; but he said 'at this explained a lot to him he had n't understood before. Olaf looked at him careful; an' Badger held up his right hand an' said that as long as Horace treated him square, he would be square with Horace, even to the point of givin' up his life for him.

"He is speakin' true," sez Olaf; and from that very minute, Badger-face became a different man, an' Horace took off the ropes.

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"You do look some like a badger with that bum beard on," sez Horace; "but I don't like this name, and I want you to pick out a new one. Pick out some Christian name, your own or any other; but now that you are startin' on a new life, it will help to have a new name."

Badger-face studied over this a long time, but he could n't root up any name to suit him so he told Horace to pick out a name, and he 'd agree to wear it.

"Well," sez Horace, after he 'd give it a good thinkin' over, "I think I 'll call you Promotheus."

Badger looked at him purty skeptical. "I don't intend to take no Greaser name," sez he. "Is that Mexican?"

"No," sez Horace. "That 's Greek; an' the original Promotheus was an all around top-notcher. He was a giant, so you could n't complain none on your size; he rebelled again' the powers, so you could n't call him a dog-robber; but the thing 'at you two are closest together in, is your infernal stubbornness. They tried to break Promotheus down by chainin' him to a rock while the vultures fed on his liver, but they could n't make him give in. 'Pity the slaves who take the yoke,' sez he; 'but don't pity me who still have my own self-respect.'"

Badger-face was so blame weak that his eyes filled up with tears at this; an' the only way he could straighten himself up was to put a few florid curses on his own thumby left-handedness; but Olaf had gone after some wood, so it did n't start anything. "I 'll take that name," sez he, "an' I 'll learn how to spell an' pronounce it as soon as I can; but you 've diluted down my blood so confounded thin with your doggone, sloppy milk diet that I 'm a long way from havin' that feller's grit, right at this minute."

Horace stood over Badger-face, an' pointed his finger at

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him, fierce. "Listen to me," sez he. "The next time you heave out an insult to milksops or milk diets, I 'll sing you my entire song — to the very last word."

We set up a howl; but Badger-face did n't realize all he was up against when he took on with Horace, so he only smiled in a sickly way, an' looked puzzled.

"I 'll tell ya what I 'm willin' to do, Dinky," said he, as soon as we stopped our noise; "now that I 've took a new name, I don't need to wear this sort of a beard any more, an', if ya want me to, I 'll trim it up the same fool way 'at you wear yours; an' I 'll wear glasses, too, if you say the word."

"We 'll wait first to see how you look in a biled shirt," sez Horace; "but in honor of your new name, I 'm goin' to let you have some deer-meat soup for your dinner, an' a bone to gnaw on."

We had a regular feast that day, and called Badger-face Promotheus every time we could think up an excuse; so as to have practice on the name. The Friar did his best to take part; but I knew every line in his face, and it hurt me to see him fightin' at himself.

After dinner we took a walk together; but we did n't talk none until we had climbed the rim, fought the wind for a couple of hours, an' started back again. It was his plan to think of some big, common chunk of life when he was in trouble, so as to take his mind as much as possible off himself; and he started to talk about Horace an' Promotheus. He even laughed a little at the combination which Promotheus Flannigan an' Horace Walpole Bradford would make when they settled down on the East again.

"The more I think it over," said the Friar, "the plainer I can see that most of our sorrow an' pain and savageness

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comes from our custom of punishin' the crops instead of the farmers. Look at the possibilities the' was in Promotheus when he started out. He has a strong nature, and in spite of his life, he still has a lot o' decent humanity in him. Who can tell what he might have been, if his good qualities had been cultivated instead o' smothered?"

"That 's true enough," sez I; "and look at Horace, too. They simply let him wither up for forty years, and yet all this time he had in him full as much devilment as Promotheus himself."

"Oh, we waste, we waste, we waste!" exclaimed the Friar. "Instead o' usin' the strength and vigor of our manhood in a noble way, we let some of it rust and decay, and some of it we use for our own destruction. The outlaw would have been the hero with the same opportunity, and who can tell what powers lie hidden behind the mask of idleness!"

"Well, that 's just it," sez I. "A human bein' is like a keg o' black stuff. For years it may sit around perfectly harmless; and only when the right spark pops into it can we tell whether it 's black sand or blastin' powder. Even Horace, himself, thought he was black sand; but he turned out to be a mighty high grade o' powder."

We walked on a while without talkin'; but the Friar was wrastlin' with his own thoughts, an' finally he stopped an' asked me as solemn as though I was the boss o' that whole country: "If you had started a lot o' work, and part of it promised to yield a rich harvest with the right care, and part of it looked as though it might sink back to worse than it had been in the beginnin' — is there anything in the world which could make you give it up?"

The Friar knew my life as well as I did; so I did n't have

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to do any pertendin' with him. "Yes," I sez, "the right woman would."

The Friar did n't do any pertendin' with me either. He stood, shakin' his head slowly from side to side. "I wish I knew, I wish I knew," he said.

We walked on again, an' when we came in sight o' the cabin, I sez to him, in order to give him a chance to free his mind if he saw fit: "Horace told me what he knew about it."

"Yes, I know," sez the Friar; "but no one knew very much. She was a splendid brave girl, Happy. I had known her when she was a little girl and I a farmer boy. I was much older than she was, but I was allus interested in her. There was n't one thing they could say against her — and yet they drove her out o' my life. I thought she was dead, I heard that she was dead; so I buried her in my heart, and came out here where life was strong and young, because I could not work back there. I tried to work in the slums of the cities; but I could not conquer my own bitterness, with the rich wastin' and the poor starvin' all about me. I have found joy in my life out here; but she has come to life again with that picture, and once more I am at war with myself."

"Well, I 'll bet my eyes, Friar," sez I, "that you find the right answer; but I have n't got nerve enough to advise ya — though I will say that if it was me, I 'd pike out an' look for the girl."

"I wish I knew, I wish I knew," was all the Friar said.

Promotheus did n't have any set-backs after this. We talked over whether it would be better to have him go up to Ty's an' tell the boys some big tale about Dinky Bradford,

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or to just pull out an' leave 'em guessin'; and we finally came to the conclusion 'at the last would be the best.

He was still purty weak by the first o' February; but he was beginnin' to fret at bein' housed up any longer, so we began to get ready to hit the back-trail. By takin' wide circles we could get through all right, at this season; but with Promotheus still purty wobbly, it was n't likely to be a pleasant trip, an' we did n't hurry none with our preparations. Horace insisted on payin' Olaf two hundred dollars for his share o' the bother, an' I 'm purty certain he slipped Kit another hundred. He was n't no wise scrimpy with money.

We started on the tenth of February, Promotheus ridin' a quiet old hoss, an' still lookin' purty much like a bitter recollection. They were consid'able surprised when we arrived at the Diamond Dot; but we only told 'em as much of our huntin' as we felt was necessary.

Horace intended to start for the East at once; but next day when he put on his dude clothes again, Promotheus purty nigh bucked on him. Most of Horace's raiment was summer stuff, nachely; but he had a long checked coat 'at he wore with a double ended cap, which certainly did look comical. He had cut some fat off his middle, an' had pushed out his chest an' shoulders consid'able; so that his stuff wrinkled on him; and it took a full hour to harden Promotheus to the change.

"Do I have to look like that?" sez he.

"You conceited ape you!" sez Horace. "You could n't look like this if you went to a beauty doctor for the rest o' time; but as soon as we get where they sell clothes for humans, I 'm goin' to provide you with somethin' in the nature of a disguise."

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Disguise sounded mighty soothin' to Promotheus, so he gritted his teeth, an' said he would n't go back on his word. The fact was, that it did give ya an awful shock to see Horace as he formerly was. We had got so used to seein' him gettin' about, able an' free, that it almost seemed like a funeral to have him drop down to those clothes again.

The Friar went over to the station with us, and he an' Horace had a confidential talk; and then Horace and Promotheus got on the train and scampered off East.

"I 'm goin' to stick right here, Happy," sez the Friar. "I have let my work get way behind, in tendin' to Promotheus; but from now on I 'm goin' to tie into it again. I 'd like to do something to put the cattle men and the sheep men on better terms; but this seems like a hard problem."

"Yes," sez I, "that ain't no job for a preacher, and I 'd advise you to let it alone. The cattle men will put up the same sort of an argument for their range 'at the Injuns did; but between you and me, I doubt if they stand much more show in the long run."

"I can't see why there is n't room for both," sez the Friar. "It seems to me that the cattle men are too harsh."

"Nope," sez I, "there ain't room for 'em both, an' the's somethin' irritatin' about sheep that makes ya want to be harsh with all who have dealin's with 'em. Hosses can starve out cattle an' sheep can starve out hosses; but after a sheep has grazed over a place, nothin' bigger 'n an ant can find any forage left. Cattle are wild an' tempestus, an' they bellow an' tear around an' fight, and the men who tend 'em are a good bit like 'em; while sheep just meekly take whatever you 've a mind to give 'em; but they hang on, just the same, an' multiply a heap faster 'n cattle do. A sheep man is meek — like a Jew. If a Jew gets what he wants he 's satisfied, an' he 's

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willin' to pertend 'at he 's had the worst o' the deal; but a cattle man is never satisfied unless he has grabbed what he wanted away from some one else, an' then shot him up a little for kickin' about it. It 'll probably be fifty or a hundred years yet, before the sheep men are strong enough to worry the cattle men; but they 'll sure do it some day." That 's what I told the Friar that time at the station, an' I guessed the outcome close enough, though I did n't make much of a hit as to the time it was goin' to take.

Well, the Friar, he rode away east to Laramie, and I went north to the Diamond Dot, and got things ready for the summer work.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE HEART OF HAPPY HAWKINS

LATE the next summer, I got a fine long letter from Horace — and blame if he did n't succeed in surprisin' me again. He wrote this letter from Africa, which is about the foreignest parts this world is able to exhibit, I reckon. He told about the East not findin' favor with Promotheus, though he had done all he could for him, startin' out with high society and endin' up by takin' him down one night to a sailor's saloon and lettin' him mix into a general fight; but that Promotheus just simply could n't stand the tameness, and so they had gone to Africa to hunt big game, and give the folks out our way a chance to forget there ever had been such a cuss as Badger-face.

He sent along some photographs, too, and they was as novel as a blue moon — Horace, Promotheus, and a lot o' naked niggers totin' packs on their heads. Horace was the funniest lookin' mortal a body ever saw; but Promotheus had him beat a mile. They both wore bowls on their heads an' colored glasses; but Promotheus with side-burns was sure enough to frighten a snake into convulsions! His gnawin' teeth stuck out through a self-satisfied grin; and I was willin' to bet that as soon as the heathen saw him, they 'd give up bowin' down to wood an' stone.

The next time I saw Friar Tuck, he told me about receivin' a letter from Horace who had gone to Berlin on his way to Africa, but had n't been able to learn anything satis-

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factory. The singer had been the big card at their concerts, an' there had been some talk about her gettin' drugged by an Austrian who belonged to the em-bassy; but she had disappeared complete, an' nobody could be found who seemed to know anything about it. The Friar kept himself goin' like a steam-engine these days; but while he became a little more tender if possible, he lacked something of his old-time spirits. Before this, he used to come sweepin' along like a big cool breeze, an' a feller's spirits just got up an' whirled along with him, like dry leaves dancin' in the wind.

He said 'at since Promotheus had slipped out o' the country, the Cross-branders had n't bothered Olaf any; but I called his attention to the fact that this was a wet spring, an' told him 'at when we had a long dry spell, Ty Jones would just swallow Olaf like quicksand.

Things drifted along purty steady in our parts for several years. Once in a while, the Friar would tell me something about Olaf or something about Ty Jones; but for the most part, I was too much took up with other things to care much for even the Friar's doin's.

I was takin' my own Moses-trip durin' these years; and I say now, as I allus have said, that it was n't a square shake to show Moses the promised land, an' then not let him into it for even one meal o' milk an' honey. I 've handled a small bunch o' men an' trailed cattle with 'em for only three months at a stretch; but I don't mind tellin' you that the' was times when I had to sit up till after midnight, sewin' up the rips in my patience — an' we did n't have any women an' children along either. Moses had forty years of it in the desert; with a whole blame tribe of Israelties; and yet, instead o' praisin' him for hangin' on to his sanity with all the odds again' him, he was handed a tantalizer, simply be-

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cause he said he could n't see why somethin' did n't happen in a natural, orderly way, once in a while, without everlastingly ringin' in some new kind of a miracle on him.

If I had to pilot a mob like that through a desert for forty years, follerin' a cloud by day an' a pillar o' fire by night, havin' dressed quail an' breakfast-food tossed to me out o' the sky, gettin' my drinkin' water by knockin' it out of a rock, an' tryin' to satisfy the tourists that it was n't altogether my fault that we traveled so everlastin' slow — I 'd 'a' been mad enough to bite all the enamel off my teeth, and yet as far as I could see, Moses did n't do a single thing but show out a little peevish once in a while.

Still, we did n't choose our natures nor the kind o' life to range 'em over nor the sorts o' temptations we 'd prefer to wrastle with; an' even our own experiences are more 'n we can understand — to say nothin' o' settin' back an' decidin' upon the deeds of others. My own test was n't the one I 'd 'a' chosen; and yet, for all I know, it may 'a' been the very best one, for me.

Little Barbie had finally grown up through childhood to the gates o' womanhood — and as generally happens, she had found a man waitin' for her there. Through all the years of her growin', she had been sendin' out tendrils which reached over an' wound about my heart, and grew into it an' through it, and became part of it. If it had n't 'a' been for Friar Tuck, I might 'a' married her, myself; for I could have done it, if all the men I 'd had to fight had been other men — but the man I could n't overcome, was myself.

Through all the years I had known Friar Tuck an' rode with him an' worked with him an' slept out under the stars with him, he had been quietly trainin' me for the time when it would be my call to take my own love by the throat, for

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the sake of the woman I loved. It don't weaken a man to do this; but it tears him — My God, how it does tear him!

I, my own self, brought back the man she loved to her, and gave her into his arms; and I 've never regretted it for one single minute; but I doubt if I 've ever forgot it for much longer 'n this either.

I did what it seemed to me I had to do — an' the Friar thinks I did right, which counts a whole lot more with me 'n what others think. I went through my desert, I climbed my hill, for just one moment I saw into my promised land — and then I was jerked back, and not even given promotion into the next world, which Moses drew as his consolation-prize. And yet, takin' it all around, I can see where life has been mighty kind and generous to me after all, and I 'm not kickin' for a minute.

The great break in my life came in the fall, and it left ol' Cast Steel a more changed man 'n it did me. I wanted to swing out wide — to ride and ride and ride until I forgot who I was and what had happened; but the ol' man worked on my pity, an' I agreed to stay on with him a spell. Durin' the three years precedin', I had got into the handlin' of the ranch, more 'n he had, himself; so I spent the winter makin' my plans, an' goin' over 'em with him. He came out toward spring and was more like himself; but when the first flowers blossomed on the benches, they seemed to be drawin' their life blood out o' my very heart. All day long I had a burnin' in my eyes, everywhere I went I missed somethin', until the empty hole in my breast seemed likely to drive me frantic; an' one day I pertended to be mad about some little thing, an' threw up my job for good and all.

The ol' man was as decent as they ever get. He knew how I had been hit, an' he did n't try any foolishness. He

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gave me what money I wanted, told me to go and have it out with myself, an' come back to him as soon as I could. I rode away without havin' any aim or end in view, just rode an' rode an' rode with memories crowdin' about me so thick, I could n't see the trail I was goin'.

Then one night I drew up along side o' Friar Tuck's fire, saw the steady light of his courage blazin' out through his own sadness, the same as it had done all those years; an' I flopped myself off my hoss, threw myself flat on the grass, an' only God and the Friar know how many hours I lay there with his hand restin' light on my shoulder, the little fire hummin' curious, soothin' words o' comfort, and up above, the same ol' stars shinin' down clear and unchangin' to point out, that no matter how the storms rage about the surface o' the earth, it 's allus calm and right, if a feller only gets high enough.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE LITTLE TOWN OF BOSCO

I HAD N'T done much eatin' or sleepin' on that trip, an' I was plumb beat out; so after I fell asleep, the Friar put a soogan over me and left me by the fire. He awakened me next mornin', gettin' breakfast, and it did n't take him very long to talk me into joinin' on to him for company. I had been avoidin' humans, for fear I might be tempted to start trouble and find the easy way out of it all; but his plan was just the opposite — to dive so deep into humanity that I could catch a glimpse o' the scheme o' things.

The Friar held that we all had crosses comin' to us any way. If we picked 'em up an' put 'em on our own shoulders, we 'd still be free, an' the totin' of our crosses would make us stronger; while if we tried to run away, we 'd be roped an' thrown, an' the crosses chained on us. I 'd a heap sooner be free than a slave; so I decided to carry mine, head up, an' get right with myself as soon as possible.

The Friar did n't work off any solemn stuff on me, nor he did n't try to be funny; he just turned himself into a sun-glass, an' focused enough sunshine on to me to warm me up without any risk of blisterin'. I got to know him even better those days than I had before. His hair was gettin' a bit frosty at the temples; but aside from this, he had n't aged none since the first day I had seen him. He was like some big tree growin' all by itself. Every year it

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seems a little ruggeder, every year it seems to offer a little roomier shade; but the wind and the rain and the hot sun don't seem to make it grow old. They only seem to make it take a deeper root, and throw out a wider spread o' boughs.

He told me o' some o' the scraps between the cattle men an' the sheep men — the Diamond Dot was out o' the way of sheep at that time. Then I began to take a little more interest in things, an' after takin' note for a day or so, I prophesied a dry summer; and this brought us around to Olaf.

The Friar warmed up at mention of him. He said 'at he had never seen a match turn out better 'n Olaf's. He said Kit had just what Olaf lacked, an' Olaf had just what Kit lacked, an' their boy was just about the finest kid he knew of anywhere. We decided to head up their way an' pay a visit.

As we rode along we took notice of the way things were changin'. We passed several sheep wagons, five or six irrigation ditches, an' here and there, we found men who put more faith in alfalfa 'n they did in stock. The Friar had been well to the north when I happened upon him, and we traveled a sight o' country before we reached our destination. Everywhere folks knew him, an' he knew them; and when I saw their faces light up at sight of him, I had to admit that he had done the right thing in stickin'.

Mostly he sang the "Art thou weary," one for his marchin' song, now; and it got into my blood and did a lot to healthen me up again. I can't rightly say 'at I ever got religion; but more 'n once religion has got me an' lifted me up like the Crazy Water in flood, bearin' me on over rocks an' through whirlpools, an' showin' me what a

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weak, useless thing I was at the best. The's somethin' inside me 'at allus responded to the Friar's music, an' made me willin' to sweep on over the edge o' the world with him; but when he tried to reason out religion to me, I have to own up 'at the' was a lot of it I could n't see into.

We passed Skelty's old place on our way in, an' found a red-eyed, black-headed man runnin' it. His name was Maxwell, but they still called the place Skelty's. We went in an' had dinner, an' found five or six Cross-branders there. They were doin' plenty o' drinkin' an' crackin' idiotic jokes with the girls; but they nodded friendly enough to us, an' we nodded back.

As soon as we finished, the Friar went outside for his smoke; but I leaned back right where I was for mine. One o' the Cross-branders, a tall, gaunt, squinty cuss by the name o' Dixon, was sittin' near me, and presently he turned an' sez: "You 're Happy Hawkins, ain't ya?"

"That 's me," sez I.

"Well, on the level," sez he, "what became o' Badgerface?"

"I 've often wondered about that myself," sez I.

"We supposed he got killed," sez he; "but two fellers claimed they saw him goin' south in the spring with your huntin' party."

"What made ya think he got killed?" sez I.

"'Cause he started over here one night, and never showed up again," sez he.

"I don't know what become of him," sez I. "Dinky Bradford said he was goin' to take him to Africa; but whether he did or not I can't say. I never felt no call to pry into Dinky's business. Looks to me as though we were goin' to have an extra dry summer."

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"I say so too," sez Dixon. "Who was this Dinky Bradford?"

"That 's bothered me a heap," sez I. "He claimed to be a Greek hero, though what sort o' business that is, I can't say. Finished your round-up yet?"

"Just got through. Where is this Greek hero these days?" sez he.

"Can't prove it by me," sez I. "He 's one o' these fellers no one seems to know anything about. I saw him go without eatin' for four days once, an' he came out of it in better shape 'n he went in. Badger-face was your foreman, was n't he?"

"Yes," sez he. "Ol' Pepper Kendal is foreman now."

"I should think a foreman would have some load on his shoulders with the boss gone all winter," sez I.

"The boss brought a woman back with him this time," sez Dixon.

"What!" sez I. "You don't mean ta tell me 'at Ty Jones has got him a woman after all these years?"

"That 's what," sez Dixon. "Somethin' queer about her, too. Ty has had a new shack built for her up back o' the old house. They don't seem overly friendly for a bride an' groom."

"Ain't nothin' overly friendly with Ty, is the'?" sez I.

"Oh, I dunno," sez he. "Ty ain't as sticky as taffy, but he 's a mighty good man to work for."

"What sort of a woman did he get?" sez I.

"She don't show herself much," sez he. "She 's tall an' shapely, an' right smart younger 'n Ty; but she spends most of her time in the new shack; and from all we can tell, she 's froze up tighter 'n Ty is."

"Well, I guess we 'll have to jog on. Good luck," sez I,

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and me an' the Friar rode on. He was as much beat out over Ty Jones gettin' a woman as I was; but first thing he thought of was, 'at this might have a softenin' effect on Ty, an' give him an openin'.

We reached Olaf's in time for supper, and found Kit bustlin' about as happy as a little brown hen. The Friar had n't sprung it none about the kid. He was a solid little chunk with a couple o' dimples and all the signs o' health. I looked careful into his eyes. They were full o' devilment, an' he scowled his brows down over 'em when I held him; but they were brown like Kit's.

"Oh, he 's too dirty to touch," sez Kit, beamin' all over with pride. "I just can't keep him clean, try as I will."

"Be careful, Happy, and don't soil your hands on that baby!" yells the Friar as though in a panic. "Let me have him. I was dirty once, myself."

It was plain to see 'at the kid an' the Friar were old cronies; and it was a pleasant sight to see 'em together. The Friar got down on the floor with him an' played bear an' horse an' the kid entered into it an' fair howled with merriment. Kit scolded 'em both an' took so much interest in their antics she hardly knew what she was doin' to the supper things.

Before long Olaf came in. He still took up all the space not otherwise occupied; but he had an altogether-satisfied expression which made ya forget how everlastin' ugly he really was. He took us out an' showed us the garden, an' the new wire fencin' an' the baby's swing, an' all the rest of his treasures. Olaf did n't want any more changes to take place in the world. If his vote could have made it, things would just continue as they were until the earth wore out.

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It made me feel a little lonely for a moment; but I entered in as hearty as I could.

Durin' supper I sez to Kit: "Well, Ty Jones has a woman, now; and if it improves him as much as it has Olaf, he may blossom out into a good neighbor to you yet."

"Ty Jones got a woman!" exclaimed Kit. "Well, I 'd just like to lay my eyes on the woman 'at would take Ty Jones."

"Oh, all women ain't so set on havin' a handsome man as you were," sez I.

"Well, I would n't have any other kind," sez Kit, an' she gave her head a toss while Olaf grinned like a full moon.

They were both purty well beat out to think o' Ty Jones havin' a woman, an' we all talked it over durin' the rest o' the meal. After supper, Olaf took the kid on his lap and sat by the fire tellin' us his plans, while Kit cleared up the dishes an' stuck in a word of her own now and again. It was plain to see 'at she did full as much o' the plannin' as he did, an' this was probably what made her so satisfied. The kid regarded Olaf's mustache as some sort of an exercisin' machine, an' Olaf had to fight him all the time he was talkin', but he certainly did set a heap o' store by that boy.

He told us he had about sixty cows and a fair run o' two an' three year olds with a high average of calves; but that he intended to sell the whole run to the Double V outfit up on the Rawhide, and get a small band of sheep. This flattened me out complete; but he had a lot of arguments on his side. He was also experimentin' with grain seed which he had got from Canada, an' he already had a patch of alfalfa which was doin' fine. He was one o' those fellers who can't tire 'emselves out, an' so just keep on workin' as long as the law allows 'em to use daylight. He had a young

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Swede workin' for him, but just at that time, he was off lookin' for the work hosses which had voted 'emselves a vacation, an' had gone up into the hills.

The Friar wanted to go up into the Basin country next day, so we bedded down purty early. I lay awake a long time thinkin' over what a fright Olaf had once been, and how he had straightened out of it.

Next mornin' we started soon after sun-up. The Friar had a couple o' women runnin' a Sunday School at Bosco, and he wanted to see how they were gettin' along. They had belonged to his brand of church clear back in England, and he set a lot of store by 'em; but owned up that they had their work cut out for 'em at Bosco; it bein' one o' the most ungodly little towns in the whole country.

We nooned on Carter, slipped over Boulder Creek Pass, and reached Bosco at sun-down. It allus surprised me to see how much travel the Friar could chalk up, takin' his weight into account; but he was less irritatin' to a hoss 'n airy other man I ever met up with. The more of a hurry he was in, the more time he took on the bad hills; and he never robbed a hoss by sleepin' an hour late in the mornin', an' makin' the hoss even up by travelin' beyond his gait.

The husband of one o' these women ran a saloon, the husband of the other — the women were sisters — was the undertaker and also ran a meat market. I thought this about the queerest business arrangement I had ever been confronted against; but the man himself was full as peculiar as his business.

I have a game I have played with myself all my life. I call it " why," an' I suppose it has furnished me more fun 'n anything else has. I take any proposition I come across an' say all the whys about it I can think up an' then try to

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answer 'em. Why did anything ever happen just as it did happen just when it did happen? This is the joke o' life to me. I have played it on myself times without end; but only once in a while even with myself can I follow the line back to common sense.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

TY JONES GETS A WOMAN

Bosco was a regular town with twenty or thirty houses, a post office, two general stores, three saloons, an' all such things; and right on a good stage road runnin' north an' south. We stopped with the meat-market undertaker, 'cause they did n't think it quite respectable for the Friar to live off the profits of the liquor traffic; though the Friar allus said 'at he had a heap more respect for a square saloon-keeper 'n for a sneaky drygoods merchant.

Shindy Smith was the saloon-keeper, an' Bill Duff was the undertaker. Duff was the absent-mindedest man I ever got intimate with, an' about drove his wife to distraction, she bein' one o' these hustlers who never make a false move. He had the idee that bein' an undertaker took away his license to laugh, so he allus walked on his toes an' disported as solemn a face as nature would allow; but nature had intended him for a butcher, an' had made his face round and jowly. Whenever he did n't have anything else to do, he used to sit down an' practice lookin' solemn. He 'd fix his eyes on the ceilin', clasp his hands across his stomach, pull up his eyebrows, droop his mouth, an' look for all the world like a man dyin' o' the colic.

He was so absent-minded that he 'd raise his cup to take a drink of coffee, forget what he had started to do, an' like as not pour it over his flapjacks for syrup. He started to engineer a funeral once with his butcher's apron on, and

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they told all sorts of stories about him which was shockin' to an extent; though his wife kept such a sharp eye on him, that I don't believe more 'n half of 'em. Still it was n't any sort o' business for an absent-minded man to be in.

It was an uncertain business. Of course all lines o' trade in a thinly settled country go by fits an' starts; but his was worst of all. Sometimes he 'd have as many as three funerals a month, and at others it would take him six weeks to sell out a beef carcass. A feller who had a spite again' him started the story 'at he soaked his meat in embalmin' fluid, an' then if they came an extra special rush in both lines of his business at the same time, he 'd — but then his wife kept such a skeptical eye on him, 'at I don't believe a word of these stories, an' I 'm not goin' to repeat 'em. The worst I had again' him was that he was so everlastin' careless. I lay awake frettin' about his carelessness till I could n't stand it a second longer; and then I rolled up half the beddin' an' started to sleep on the side porch.

"Where you goin'?" sez the Friar.

"This here Bill Duff is too absent-minded an' forgetful for me," sez I.

"What do ya mean?" sez the Friar.

"Well," sez I, "I don't want to make light o' sacred things, nor nothin' like that; but Bill Duff 's got somethin' stored up in this room which should 'a' been a funeral three weeks ago, and I intend to sleep outside."

The Friar chuckled to himself until he shook the whole house; but it was n't no joke to me; so I shunted the beddin' out on the roof o' the porch, which was flat, and prepared to take my rest where the air was thin enough to flow into my nostrils without scrapin' the lid off o' what Horace called his ol' factory nerve.

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As soon as the Friar could recover his breath, he staggered to the window, an' sez: "That 's nothin' but cheese, you blame tenderfoot. Limburger cheese is the food Bill Duff is fondest of, and he has four boxes of it stored in this room."

"Then," sez I, comin' in with the beddin', "I 'll sleep in the bed, an' the cheese can sleep on the porch; but hanged if I 'll occupy the same apartment with it." I set the cheese out on the porch — it was the ripest cheese in the world, I reckon — and it drew all the dogs in town before mornin'. After they found it was above their reach, I 'm convinced they put up the best fight I ever listened to.

It took a long time for the memory o' that cheese to find its way out the window; and I lay thinkin' o' the Friar's work, long after he had drifted off himself. He was n't squeamish about small things, the Friar was n't, and this was one of his main holts. When we had got ready to eat that night, Mrs. Duff had tipped Bill a wink to ask the Friar to say blessin'. Bill was in one of his vacant spells, as usual, so he looked solemn at the Friar, and sez: "It 's your deal, Parson." Now, a lot o' preachers would 'a' gone blue an' sour at that; but the Friar never blinked a winker.

Then after supper, all the young folks o' that locality had swooped in to play with him. This winnin' o' young folks was a gift with the Friar, and it used to warm me up to watch him in the midst of a flock of 'em. He showed 'em all kinds o' tricks with matches an' arithmetic numbers, an' taught 'em some new games, and then he put up a joke on 'em. He allus put up one joke on 'em each visit.

This time he puts a glass of water under his hat, looks solemn, and sez 'at he can drink the water without raisin'

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the hat. They all bet he can't, and finally he goes into a corner, makes motions with his throat, and sez he is now ready to prove it. Half a dozen rush forward and lift the hat, and he drinks the water, and thanks 'em for liftin' the hat for him so he could drink the water an' make his word good.

Some folks used to kick again' him and say he was worldly; but his methods worked, an' that 's a good enough test for me. He took out the shyness an' the meanness an' the stupidity, and gave the good parts a chance to grow; which I take it is no more again' religion than the public school is. Why, he even taught 'em card tricks.

He could take a deck of cards and turn it into a complete calendar, leap year and all; and then he could turn it into a bible, showin' easy ways to learn things, until a feller really could believe 'at cards was invented by the early Christians who had to live in caves, as some claim. All the time he was playin' with 'em, he was smugglin' in wise sayin's with his fun, pointin' out what made the difference between deceivin' for profit, and deceivin' for a little joke, tellin' 'em how to enjoy life without abusin' it — Why, he even went so far as to say that if a feller could n't be religious in a brandin' pen he could n't be religious in a cathedral — which is a two-gun church with fancy trimmin's.

By the time he had expanded the young folks and made 'em easy and at home, the older ones had arrived; and then he held a preachin'. The whole outfit joined in with the singin', and when he began to talk to 'em every eye in the room was glistenin'. You see, he knew them and their life; and they knew him and his. He had nursed 'em through sickness, he had tended their babies, he had helped to build their cabins an' turn 'em into homes; so the words flowed

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out of his heart and into theirs without any break between. This was the Friar and this was his work — but I can't put it into a story.

The' was a no-account cuss by the name o' Jim Stubbs who lived — if ya could call it livin' — at Boggs; and the Friar induced him to go along on one of his trips. When Jim came back he was a made-over man, and every one asked him if he had religion. "Hell, no," sez Jim, tryin' to be independent, "I ain't got religion; but a feller catches somethin' from the Friar the same as if he had the measles; and I don't covet to be a bum no more."

This gives ya the best idy of the Friar that I can think of; and I finally fell asleep there at Bill Duff's, with my mind made up to bury my own heartache, keep the grave of it green, but live out my life as hard as the Friar was livin' his.

We had intended to projec about in the Basin next day to rustle up some new trade in the Friar's line; but my pony turned up lame, so we held over to get him shod. When the stage pulled in that evenin', me an' the Friar went down to see it. A little feller sat on the seat with the driver. His hat was covered with dust an' pulled down over his eyes, an' what ya could see of him was the color o' coffee; but the moment I lay eyes on his side-burns, I grabbed the Friar's arm an' whispered, "Horace!" and by dad, that 's who it was. Promotheus was in the back seat, an' he looked for all the world like an enlarged copy, except that his side-burns were red an' gray, while Horace's were mostly brown. But they were cut exactly the same, startin' from his ears, runnin' across his cheeks an' lips, an' then curvin' down to the crook of his jaw, close cropped an' bristly.

Horace an' Promotheus hit the ground as soon as the stage

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stopped, an' me an' the Friar dropped back out o' sight inside the hotel. Horace gave orders about his two boxes an' started into the hotel. Just as he came through the door, I stepped out an' gave him a shove. "You can't come in here," I growled.

He stepped back as fierce as a rattler. "I can't, huh?" he piped. "Well, we 'll see if I can't."

Then he recognized me, an' we began to pump hands. He said 'at he and Promotheus had only reached home three weeks before; but they could n't stand it, an' so had made a streak for the West. He said they had been in Africa an' India, until they had become plumb disgusted with tropical heat, an' so had come out the northern route, expectin' to outfit at Bosco an' ride down to the Diamond Dot.

We suppered with 'em an' next day they bought a string o' hosses, packed their stuff on 'em, an' said they were ready for some amusement. Horace had got a little snappier in his talk an' his movements; but that was about the only change. As soon as we told 'em about Ty Jones havin' a woman, that settled it. Horace insisted upon seein' the woman, an' Promotheus echoed anything 'at Horace said, though his face clouded a bit at the idee of foolin' around the Cross brand ranch. The Friar did n't feel any call to go along with us; but it was more to my mind just then 'n his line was, so I jumped at the chance.

Horace was also mighty glad to add me to his outfit. He had been used to havin' a lot o' Zulus an' Hindus waitin' on him, and had n't adjusted himself to a small outfit yet. He said he had sent a lot o' hides an' heads an' horns and other plunder from London, England, to the Diamond Dot; but had been too busy to write durin' the past few years. He and the Friar had quite a talk together before we left; but

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I could tell from their faces 'at Horace did n't have any news for him.

We had high jinks when we reached Olaf's; but Horace did n't make any hit with the kid. The kid had a jack-in-the-box toy 'at looked consid'able like Horace, an' the kid could n't square things in his own mind, to see a big size one, out an' walkin' about like a regular human; but when he also got to studyin' Promotheus, he was all undone. Olaf tried to have him make up to Horace, but he would n't stand for it. He 'd sit on Olaf's knee and look first at his jack-in-the-box, then at Horace, and wind up with a long look at Promotheus. Promotheus would try to smile kind an' invitin', and then the kid would twist around and bury his face in Olaf's vest. Horace nor Promotheus did n't mind it any; but as far as that goes, the kid was only actin' honest an' natural, accordin' to his lights, an' the jack-in-the-box had as much of a kick comin' as anybody.

Ty had been down there just the day after we had left, an' had wanted to buy Olaf's place; but only offered half what it was worth. He had done this half a dozen times, an' allus insulted Olaf as much as he could about it. Olaf had wanted to sell out at first; but Kit had been able to see 'at they had a homestead fit for any thing, and she had allus insisted that they get full price or hang on. Now, it was improved way beyond common, an' they were both fond of it; so they had decided to stick it out.

"This is goin' to be a dry summer," sez I.

Olaf's face clouded up but he only shut his lips tighter. We told 'em we were on our way up to try an' have a look at Ty Jones's woman, and Olaf said he 'd go along if he did n't have to trail his cattle up to the Raw Hide, this bein' part o' the deal he had made. He said it would take him

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about ten days probably, an' wanted us to camp in the Spread, an' keep an eye on his stuff. Olaf clipped the first joint off o' Promotheus's name, an' I was glad of it.

We chucked our stuff into the barn next mornin' an' started to stalk the Cross brand neighborhood. Horace had a small field glass which was a wonder, and we worked as careful as we could. It was only fifteen miles across from Olaf's; but all we were able to do the first day was to find a little sheltered spot up back o' the ranch buildin's where we could get a good view of 'em through the field glass.

Next day Olaf an' Oscar started with the bunch o' cattle, an' we rode along part way with 'em to give 'em a good start; but Olaf had handled his stuff so gentle that it was no trouble, an' we turned back an' took up our watch again. We watched for a week without seein' a thing, ridin' in each night to sleep back of Olaf's shack. Me an' Theus — I had seen Olaf's ante an' had raised him one — were gettin' purty weary o' this sort o' work; but Horace was as patient as a spider. Finally though, we got a little more risky, and leavin' our hosses up in our sheltered spot, we follered down a ravine to get nearer to the new cabin.

We had caught several glimpses of a woman to prove to us 'at the' was one there; but that was about all, an' so we went down this ravine, tryin' to figure out what excuse we 'd give if we came across any of Ty Jones's men. Neither me nor The — Promotheus had said 'at we could n't be no politer 'n he could, so he had lopped off the last joint, and now had as neat a workin' name as any one, although Horace still insisted on usin' the whole outfit when he had occasion to address him. Well, neither me nor The felt just easy in our minds at snoopin' about Ty's when we had n't any business to, especially The; but Horace was as self-

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composed as though he was herdin' lions out o' tall grass, which it seems had been his favorite pastime durin' the last few years.

The knew the ravine well; he said it ran full o' water in the spring, but after that was dry all the year. We got about half-way down it, an' then we came to a path 'at was plain enough to see. The stopped an' wagged his head. "No one ever used to use this," sez he.

"Well, some one uses it purty constant, now," sez I.

"The woman is the one who uses it," sez Horace. "She 's lonely, that 's plain enough. The path climbs the opposite bank — let 's cross an' go up."

Me an' The bucked at this for some time; but Horace hung out; so we went along with him. We finally came to a little glen with a spring in it, an' grass, and in a little clump o' small trees, we came across a book lyin' face down on a Navajo blanket.

"That 's gettin' close," sez Horace.

"Yes!" sez we, in low tones.

We scouted all around; but no one was there, an' then we took a line on the hill back of us, picked out a likely spot, and returned the way we had come, this bein' the only direct way. We did n't meet a soul — at least none wearin' bodies, though from the creepy feelin' I had part of the time, I won't ever be certain we did n't meet any souls.

Next day, we circled the peak and got up to the spot we had picked out. We could see the clump o' trees plain enough; and along about three in the afternoon, we saw the woman come up the path, walkin' slow an' actin' weary. She had two big dogs with her, and whenever she 'd stop to rest a bit, she 'd pet 'em. "Well," sez The, "things has changed a heap when ol' Ty Jones stands for havin' his dogs patted."

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We could n't get a good view of her face from where we were, but we could get a fine view o' the ranch buildin's. The' did n't seem to be much work on hand, and we saw eight or ten men foolin' around an' pretendin' to do chores. The recognized the two Greasers he had been ridin' with the day he had pulled on Horace, and one or two others; but most of 'em was strangers to him. He said the Greasers were about the most devilish speciments he had ever herded with — an' Ty's whole outfit was made up o' fellers who had qualified to wear hemp.

Horace was keen to go on down to her an' get a good look; but me an' The took the bits in our teeth at this. We knew what those dogs were like, an' refused pointblank to go a peg unless he could think up a good enough excuse for us to give to Ty Jones — and we would n't let Horace go down alone.

"The best plan I can see," sez I, pointin' to a cluster o' big rocks down the slope to the left, "is to circle back to those rocks. We can see her face plain from there when she comes back the path."

After examinin' this plan we decided it was the best; but when we went after our hosses, Horace's had broke his reins an' gone back through the hills. By the time me an' The had rounded him up, it was too late, so we had to wait till next day.

Next day I left the other two at our first look-out and rode on to the new one. As soon as she came in sight, I waved my hat to 'em and they sneaked down to the bunch o' rocks. I rode back an' left my hoss with theirs, an' then joined 'em.

She did n't come into view till after five o'clock. When she reached the edge of the ravine an' started down, she paused an' looked off into the valley with her face in plain

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view. Horace looked at it through his glasses, gave a start, and then handed the glasses to The. "Have you ever seen any one who looked like her?" sez he.

The looked and broke out into a regular expression. "That 's the original of the photograph I had," sez he.

"That 's the Friar's girl, sure as the sky 's above us," sez Horace.

I grabbed the glass and took a look. She did look like the picture, but older and more careworn. Some way I had allus thought o' the Friar's girl as bein' young and full of high spirits, with her head thrown back an' her eyes dancin'; but just as I looked through the glasses, she pressed her hands to her head, and her face was wrinkled with pain. She was better lookin' than common, but most unhappy.

"That devil, Ty Jones, is mean to her!" I growled between my teeth.

"Dogs or no dogs, I 'm goin' down to have a talk with her," sez Horace.

He started to get up, but I pulled him back to the ground. I had kept my eyes on her, and had seen the two dogs turn their heads down the ravine, and her own head turn with a jerk, as though some one had called to her. Horace looked through the glasses again, and said he could see her lips move as though talkin' to some one, and then she went down into the ravine. We could n't see the bottom of the ravine from where we were, nor we could n't see the ranch buildin's; so we hustled back through some washes to our look-out, and reached it just as she and Ty came out at the bottom.

They were walkin' side by side, but Horace, who was lookin' through the glasses, said they seemed to be quarrelin'.

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"It 's moonlight to-night," sez Horace, "and I 'm goin' to sneak down and try to see her."

We argued again' it all we could, but he stood firm; so all we could do was to sit there and wait for the lights to go out in the bunk-house. As she was a reader, we figured 'at she 'd be the last one to turn in; normal habits an' appetites not havin' much effect on book-readers.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

JUSTICE UNDELAYED

HUMAN emotions are like clocks: some of 'em will run longer 'n others; but they 'll all run down unless they 're wound up again every so often. Even fear will only run so long, as several late-lamented bullies have been forced to learn just before they passed over the Great Divide. After you 've scared a feller as bad as he can get, it is well enough to let him alone. If you keep on addin' horror onto horror, his fear is likely to run down; and the chances are 'at he 'll get irritated, and slaughter ya.

I don't know whether or not patience can rightly be called an emotion; but anyway, mine runs down a little easier 'n airy other o' my faculties, and sittin' up in the chill an' waitin' for a lot o' festive fools to go to bed, allus was just the sort o' thing to disgust me. Those Cross-branders did n't seem to have any more use for shut-eye that night than a convention o' owls. Some of 'em rode off at dusk, but more of 'em arrived, and they held some sort of high jinks in the bunk-house, till I began to talk back at myself loud enough for all to hear. It was full moon an' we could see dogs loafin' an' fightin' down at the ranch, the light in the new cabin was the first to go out, an' for the life of me, I could n't see where we had a single pair to stay on; but Horace seemed to accumulate obstinacy with every breath he drew. The sided with me, but criticizin' Horace went

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again' his religion, so he did n't make any more uproar than a gnat fight.

Finally I calmed down until I could stretch each word out a full breath an' sez in my doviest voice: "Horace, will you kindly tell me what in hell you intend to do?"

He studied the situation careful, and took all the time he needed to do it. "I 'm goin' back to camp," sez he. "To-morrow night they 'll be sleepy, and we 'll have the whole place to ourselves."

"Hurrah for hot weather! Greece has finally melted!" I yelled, an' we hustled for our ponies.

I have a buck-skin riggin' I put on the bridle of a hoss who gets into the evil way of steppin' on his reins; and I had fixed one on Horace's hoss to bring him back to his senses should he attempt to play the same trick he had worked on us the day before. When a hoss wearin' one o' these contrivances steps on his reins it pinches his ears, down close to his head where they 're tender, and generally works a reformation in short order.

We forgot all about this, and when Horace jumped into his saddle, he gave a jerk on the reins — and got bucked into a clump o' cactus. The hoss did n't try any runnin', though, which proves he had learned a proper respect for trailin' reins. Still, Horace was n't quite in the mood to see the beauty o' my method, so he insisted upon my swappin' hosses with him. It was a good two-hours' ride to Olaf's, and by the time we had changed saddles, and I had convinced the pony that his idees of buckin' were childish an' fu-tile, and his show of temper had only given him a hundred an' ninety pounds to carry instead of a hundred an' twenty, it was after nine o'clock.

We were hungry enough to call for speed; but still it

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was eleven by the time we reached the Spread. We thought we had seen a horseman go into it from the other direction; but the moon had ducked under a cloud and we could n't be certain.

We did n't intend to waken Kit if we could help it; so we started to put the hosses into the corral as quiet as possible. Just as we had thrown our saddles over the top bar, we heard a commotion from the cabin, and started for it on the run.

There was n't any light in the cabin; but we heard Kit screamin', and before we arrived, we saw a man rush around the corner just as the door was flung open, and two other men jumped towards him from the inside. These two had knives in their hands; and the man outside took a step back. They rushed him, but he hit one with his right fist, and the other with his left, and curled 'em both up again' the side o' the house in a way to make a feller's heart dance for joy. Then we saw it was the Friar himself, and we gave a whoop.

Kit had banged the door shut, put up the bar, got a rifle and made ready for what was to come next; but when she heard our whoop, she put on her wrapper and opened the door. The two men 'at the Friar had crumpled up were those same two Greasers 'at The had told us were the meanest pair he had ever herded with.

We took 'em by the heels an' straighened 'em out, while Kit indulged in a few little hystericals. The Friar had allus been a great hand to expound upon moral force an' spiritual force, and such items, and now when the two Greasers refused to come back an' claim their own bodies, he got a little fidgetty.

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"Friar," I sez, "I give in to you. Your quiet way o' lettin' the right work out its own salvation is the surest way I know; and in an emergency like this, it does full as well as violence."

The Friar was n't in no mood for hilarity, though; so after gettin' their weapons an' tyin' 'em up, we soused the Greasers with water, and brought 'em back to give an account o' themselves, Kit all the time tellin' us what had happened.

It seems 'at Kit had been hoein' in her beloved garden that day an' had been purty tired at night; so after waitin' for us until she got exasperated, she had eaten her own supper, put ours on the table, an' turned in. Olaf had put up another cabin the same size as his first. He had put 'em side by side with a porch joinin' at their eaves. In one cabin was the dinin' room an' kitchen, all in one, and in the other was the bedroom an' settin' room.

Kit had heard a noise in the settin' room and had opened the door before she was full awake, thinkin' it was the dog or cat. The minute she had opened the door they had grabbed her, and she had begun to scream. They shut off her wind a little; but they was n't rough with her — quite the contrary. They leered into her eyes, and patted her on the shoulders, and made queer, gurglin' noises in their dirty brown throats; but they did n't speak to her, not one word.

Kit was strong, an' she had fought 'em to a standstill for what she thinks was twenty minutes, at least; but she was beginnin' to weaken. One of 'em kept his arm about her neck, and whenever she tried to scream, shut off her wind. She had heard the Friar's hoss nicker when he opened the first pole gate, and this provided her with enough moral

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courage to sink her teeth into the wrist of the arm about her neck. The feller had give a yell, and struck her; but at the same time, she had opened up a scream of her own which loosened things all over the neighborhood.

The Friar had first put for the settin' room door; but they had locked this door on the inside, intendin' to go out the side door. He savvied this so he dove into the porch-way between the two cabins, and made a rattlin' on this door. They had paused at this; but he had to rattle several times before they took down the front bar. We had been fordin' the crick about this time.

The Greasers had tried to get out the window once; but Kit had called out what they were up to; so they had turned on her an' choked and beat her scandalous.

This was Kit's side, and by the time she had finished tellin' it, the Greasers had begun to moan an' toss. The Friar gave a sigh of relief, as soon as they came to enough to begin grittin' their teeth. I sat 'em up with their backs again' the side of the cabin, and intimated that we were ready to receive their last words.

We had to encourage 'em a bit, one way or another; but we finally got out of 'em that they had poisoned the dog, and then cut a crack in the door till they could raise the bar. They said 'at Ty Jones had n't had no hand in plannin' their trip; but had offered 'em a hundred apiece if they could put Olaf in the mood of wishin' he had sold out peaceable.

"Well," sez I, as soon as they were through, "shall we finish with 'em to-night, or give 'em till to-morrow to repent?"

"We shall of course deliver them to the proper officials to be tried by due process of law," sez the Friar.

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"What for?" sez I. "Ya never can tell how a trial will turn out; but we know 'at they have forfeited the right to live; so we 'll just give 'em what they 've earned and save all fuss."

"No good ever comes of men taking the law into their own hands," sez the Friar firmly.

"How come, then, that you did n't run an' tell some justice o' the peace, 'at these two snakes was actin' disrespectful — instead of knockin' 'em up again' the logs?" sez I.

"I should have done so if I had had time," sez the Friar with dignity.

"Well, you 're better trained 'n we are," sez I; "but it still takes a little time for you to make your hands mind your self-control, after you 've been het up. You can do it in ten minutes, say; but it takes us about a week, and by that time the' won't be any need for the law."

"No," sez the Friar, "I insist that we rely upon the law. We count ourselves as of the better element; and the most vicious conditions arise when the better element takes the law into its own hands. When a vicious man does illegal violence, it does not establish a precedent; but when the decent man does the same thing, it tears away forms of civilization which have taken centuries to construct."

"That sounds like sense," sez I; "and after this is all over, I don't mind arguin' it out with you; but right now, it would seem to me that if we went to law about this, it would be because we wanted to shoulder onto the law the responsibility of doin' what we feel ought to be done, but which we have n't the nerve to do ourselves."

"If you attempt to lynch these men, I shall ride at once and give the alarm," sez the Friar.

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"And when you came back, you would find 'em swingin' from a limb," sez I. "I 'm with you in most things, Friar, and if the' was a shred o' doubt, I 'd be with you in this; but it 's too plain a case. I 'm willin' to hold these two in secret until we can collect a posse o' twelve to give 'em a jury trial; but this is the most I 'll do. Ty Jones has got others of his gang away from the law, but he don't get these two — not if I can help it."

Horace sided with me, and so did The, though he did n't have much to say. He was thinkin' of his own trip to pester Olaf, and it came back to him purty strong. The Friar finally had to agree not to notify the law until I 'd had time to gather up a posse. I made Horace promise not to tell the Friar about our seein' the woman back at Ty's, saw that the Greasers were planted safe in Olaf's log barn, and set out at once for the Diamond Dot on a fresh hoss. I never want to eat none before startin' a ride like this.

I rode all that night through the moonlight; swingin' up over the passes, fordin' the rivers, and reachin' the Diamond Dot at noon the next day. I did n't let on to Jabez 'at I was there at all; but I got Spider Kelley, ol' Tank Williams, Tillte Dutch, and Mexican Slim to take a vacation and come on back with me. This gave five for the jury, as I did n't intend to have Horace or The sit on it, not knowin' how far their prejudice might prevent 'em from executin' my idee of justice. We set out to return, about five o'clock, and rode into the Spread at seven the next mornin' with eight other fellers we had brought along for good measure.

Old Jimmy Simpson and his four grown sons were in this bunch, and I was purty well acquainted with 'em. I knew 'at they had been amply pestered by Ty Jones's outfit, and would n't be too particular about what book-law might

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have to say on the subject, though ol' man Simpson was up on book-law. The other three were fellers they knew and were willin' to guarantee. We were all a little sleepy, so we decided to hold the trial after dinner.

The Friar had spent as much time with the Greasers as they 'd stand for; but he had n't made much impression on 'em. I knew 'at he was heart-whole in his attitude, an' I hated to cross him; but this was a case o' principle with me, so when we got ready for the trial, I tried to get him to take a long walk, but he refused.

We held the trial in front o' the barn, and it was as legal as any trial ever was, and as solemn, too. We untied the prisoners, and called Kit for the first witness. She told it just as she had told it to us, but her bruised face would have been all that was necessary. Then we called the Friar and he told his part, and we let him make a speech in favor o' law and order; and cheered him hearty, too, when he got through.

I had just begun to give my part, when Olaf and Oscar rode up. Olaf sat on his hoss and looked at us a moment, at Kit with her bruised face, holdin' the boy in her arms, at the prisoners and us; and then he asked the Friar what it all meant. The Friar was sunonomous with truth, as far as Olaf was concerned.

Olaf listened quietly, the dark red risin' in his cheeks bein' about the only change in him. When the Friar finished, Olaf got off his hoss. "The' won't be need of any more trial," sez he. "Kit, you go to the house."

Kit started for the house, and the Friar asked Olaf what he intended to do.

"Kill 'em," sez Olaf, "with my two hands."

He unbuckled his belt and threw it on the ground, then

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kicked off his chaps, and stepped through the ring we had formed. "Stop," said the Friar. "Olaf, I forbid this."

"You had better go to the house, Friar," said Olaf with pleadin' in his voice. "Go in — please go in — an' comfort Kit."

The Friar made a rush, but we fended him off. The Greasers also tried to make a get-away; and between the three of 'em we were some busy; but it did n't last long. When the Greasers saw they could n't break our ring, they turned on Olaf like cornered rats. They struck him and they choked him; but not once did he speak, and whenever his grip closed on their flesh, he ruined that part forever. It was a horrid sight; but I could n't have turned my eyes away if I 'd wanted to. In the end he broke their necks, one after the other, and then he stood up straight and wiped his forehead. "I take the blame," said he. "I take all the blame, here and hereafter"; which certainly was a square thing to do, though we had n't counted on it, any.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE FRIAR GOES ALONE

THE Friar had been in earnest tryin' to get to Olaf; so 'at the four Simpson boys had finally been forced to throw, an' sit on him. As soon as it was over, they got up and apologized, offerin' to let him take out any spite on 'em he saw fit, and promisin' not to feel any ill-will; but the Friar was n't angry. He was hurt and sad to think 'at we 'd do such a thing; but he had no resentment towards us.

"I know most of you men well," said he; "and I know you have done this because you felt it was right. I don't put you on one side and myself on the other. I take my full share o' the blame. It merely proves that my influence with you during the many years we have been together has not been for the best, and I am very sorry to learn how poor my work has been."

He turned and went up to the house; and we all felt nearly as bad about the way he had taken it as though the confounded Greasers had got away altogether. We talked it over and finally loaded their bodies into Olaf's wagon, and hauled 'em up on the rim, where we buried 'em and heaped a lot o' stones over 'em. We began to feel better after this, and shook hands all around, and the Simpsons and their three friends rode away.

Then we told the others about havin' seen the Friar's girl at Ty Jones's and held a council as to how we should tell him. We finally delegated Horace to do it, though he was n't

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ambitious for the job. The Friar had told Kit that it was all over, and had left to take a walk without eatin' any supper. We still felt purty low-spirited, and we did n't eat much ourselves; though we felt certain he would n't bother his head much about a couple o' Greasers, as soon as he found out his own girl was Ty Jones's woman.

The boys had come light from the Diamond Dot, but Horace had outfitted way beyond his needs, intendin' to do consid'able campin' around, and Olaf also had a couple of extra tarps and plenty o' beddin'; so we fixed up our old bunk-shack which had been left standin', and settled down as though the interval between our previous visit had n't been more 'n ten days.

The Friar came back about ten o'clock. He came into our shack as quiet as he could; but Horace was sittin' before the fire waitin' for him. It was a warm night; but we had built the fire to make it a little more cheerful, and had left the door wide open. Horace saw the Friar the minute he reached the doorway, and he got up and went outside with him.

They were gone nearly an hour, and then Horace sneaked in, and wakened me up. I follered him outside; and he said that the Friar intended to ride down to see Ty Jones as soon as it was day, and that he insisted on ridin' alone. The Friar was walkin' up and down in the moonlight, his face was all twisted up, through his tryin' to hold it calm, when I took my turn at reasonin' with him; but it was n't any use.

"Well, you 'll not go alone," I said at last; "and you can make up your mind to that now. We don't know how much Ty already knows about our puttin' the Greasers out o' the game, and we don't know how much of it he 'll lay to you;

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but we do know that he hates you, and would wipe your name off the list the first good chance he had. I 'm goin' along."

The Friar was hot; we stood there in the moonlight facin' each other and takin' each other's measures. He was a shade taller and some heavier 'n I was; and ya could see 'at he 'd have given right smart to have felt free to mix it with me. "Do you think I 'm a baby?" he burst out. "Do you think 'at I 'm not fit to be trusted out o' your sight? You take entirely too much on yourself, Happy Hawkins!"

I did n't want to taunt him to hurt him — I 'd rather been kicked by a hoss than to do this — but I did want to arouse him to a sense o' the truth. "You have adjusted yourself to this locality purty well, Friar," sez I; "but the's still a lot you don't quite savvy. Some cases must be settled by a man himself, but some must be left to the law. If this woman is the wife o' Ty Jones, he has the law on his side."

He turned from me and stamped off into the night with his hands clenched. He disappeared in the cottonwoods, and I was just beginnin' to wonder if I had n't better foller him, when he came back again. "Oh, I 've been a fool, I 've been a fool!" he cried. "All my life I have tried not to judge others, but all my life I have judged them. I have tried to put myself in their place, but allus I judged and condemned them for giving way to temptations which I felt that I, in their place, could have resisted. I have been a fool, and I still am a fool. I admit that you are right, and I am wrong — but, I am going to Ty Jones's at dawn, and I 'm goin' alone."

Well, that settled it — me an' the Friar had to buck each other again. He continued to stalk up an' down through moonlight and shadow; while I tried to plan a way to head

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him off. I was dead sleepy, but I went around and wakened up all the other fellers, and told 'em not to get up in the mornin' until called; next I got Tank to help me, and we waited until the Friar had walked in the opposite direction, and then we took the ponies out o' the corral and headed 'em toward the hills. The farther we got, the rougher with 'em we got, and then we turned our own mounts loose, and sent 'em after the bunch. It was a big job to pack our saddles back on our heads, but we did it, and tore down the fences to pertend 'at the ponies had vamoosed on their own hook. Horace was walkin' with the Friar now, arguin' the benefit of a little sleep, so 'at he 'd be at his best. After a time the Friar did go to bed in Horace's tarp in the corner.

I did n't wake up till after seven, myself, and all the fellers were pertendin' to sleep as though it was n't more 'n three. The Friar did n't wake up till eight. He was beside himself when he found the ponies gone; but he ate breakfast as calm as he could, and then set out with us to wrangle in some hosses on foot.

Goin' after hosses on foot is sufficiently irritatin' to a ridin' outfit to make it easy enough to believe 'at this was all an accident, and we did n't come up with the ponies till nearly noon. When we cornered 'em up, I never in my life saw as much poor ropin', nor as much good actin'; but we finally got enough gentle ones to ride bareback, so we could wrangle in the rest; and after a quick lunch, the Friar started to make his hoss ready.

We all started along with him. He stopped and faced on us, givin' us a long, cold look-over. You can say all you want to again' swearin', but the's times when it springs out of its own accord in a man, as natural and beautiful and satisfyin' as the flowers blossom forth on the cactus plants;

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and I have n't a shred of doubt that if the Friar had handed us some o' the remarks that came ready-framed to his tongue just then, they 'd have been well worth storin' up for future needs; but all he did was to fold his arms, and say: "Your methods are not my methods. I am not goin' there to start trouble, and I do not even wish to give them the slightest excuse to start it of their own vo-lition. If you are my friends, you will respect my wishes."

"Well, but you 'll take at least one of us along, won't ya, Friar?" sez ol' Tank. "Likely as not we would n't take it up, nohow; but still if they made away with ya, we 'd sort o' like to know about it as early as possible, in order not to feel suspensed any longer 'n was necessary."

"I should like to take one man along as a guide, as I am not entirely familiar with the trail from here," sez the Friar, still talkin' to us as though we were a lot of evil-lookin' strangers. "If one of you were to go along until we came within sight o' the ranch buildin's — No, they might see him and get the idee that he had gone back to join a reserve body, and I do not wish them to have the slightest grounds for resorting to force on their side. I shall have to go alone."

"I can see what you 've been drivin' at, now," sez Tank, whose face was so muddled up that no one ever tried to read his thoughts in his features, and so he could lie with impunity. "Yes, I can see what you mean, now, and I got to own up 'at you 're right about it. Still, you know, Friar, we 're bound to worry about ya. How long do you want us to wait before we start to projectin' around to get some news of ya?"

A look of relief came to the Friar's face: "Why, if I don't come back within a week," sez he, "I have n't any

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objections to your notifyin' the legal authorities that you fear something has happened to me — but don't make much fuss, for it does n't really matter."

We all kicked about waitin' a week, but finally compromised on five days as bein' about the right interval to allow before notifyin' the legal authorities. Then we advised the Friar to go down by the ravine as it would take him to the ranch by the back way where he would n't be so likely to attract attention, especially from the dogs.

He asked Horace to ride with him until he could get a landmark; so Horace flung his saddle on a hoss an' started along, while the rest of us made ready to go trout-fishin', or take a snooze, or shake the cards, accordin' to the way we generally amused ourselves when loafin'. The Friar turned back once on the pretense that he wanted to get a good drink o' water before startin'; but he found us scattered out peaceful an' resigned, so he headed away at good speed.

Horace took him the open road, while we went mostly through cuts, the way we had allus gone to our look-out. Our way was some the longer; but we pushed our hosses a little more, and made the look-out just as the Friar reached the point where the path went down into the ravine. Horace had agreed to do all he could to get the Friar to go up to the clump of bushes where the woman spent her afternoons, though he said he doubted if the Friar would do it.

I had the field glasses with me, and kept 'em on the Friar's face when he paused to examine the spot and make sure he was right. He could n't see the ranch buildin's from where he was, nor the path leadin' to the clump of trees. I could see his face plain through the glasses, and he had taken the

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guy ropes off and let it sag into just the way he felt. It was filled with pain an' sufferin'.

As soon as Horace came, he and I sneaked down to the bunch o' big rocks from which we could see the path as it dipped from the opposite edge of the ravine, leavin' the rest of the boys to watch the ranch buildin's. We could see them from where we were, and they could see us, and we had a signal for us to come back, or them to come to us; and another that the Friar was gettin' it bad down below, and to make a rush for him. We had n't seen any one about the buildin's, except the Chinese cook. Our plan was to not rush the buildin's right away, unless we saw the Friar gettin' manhandled beyond his endurance. Horace said 'at the Friar had refused to go to the clump o' trees to see the woman, as it might give the impression that she had sent word to him to meet her there, and he would n't cast the slightest suspicion upon her name.

"Horace," I said, as an awful fear struck me, "supposin' after all, it ain't the right woman!"

Horace's eyes stuck out like the tail lights on a freight caboose. "Oh, I 'm sure it 's the same woman," sez he. "Course she 's changed some; but we could n't all three be mistaken."

"I still think it 's the same woman," sez I; "but as far as all three not bein' mistaken, the's nothin' to that. Half o' the fellers who make bets are mistaken, and most of us make bets. Still I think she 's the same woman."

In spite of this doubt, I was feelin' purty comfortable. The other time we had been there, I had n't been able to think up any excuse as to why; but this time I felt I was in right and it left me free to enjoy the prospects of a little excitement. I allus try to be honest with myself; and when

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I 'm elated up over anything, I generally aim to trail back my feelin's to their exact cause. I 'm bound to admit that when I 'm certain that any trouble likely to arise will be thrust upon me in spite of my own moral conduct, I allus take a pleasant satisfaction in waitin' for it.

The Friar slid his hoss down the bank o' the ravine, and disappeared just a few moments before we saw the woman comin' along the path from the clump of trees. We kept glancin' up at the look-out now and again, but mostly we glued our eyes on the woman. Horace hogged the field glasses most o' the time, but my eyes were a blame sight better 'n his, so I did n't kick about it much.

When she reached the edge o' the ravine, she paused and gave a little start. "Does she know him, Horace?" I sez.

"She don't seem to," sez Horace. "She 's speakin' down at him; but her face looks as though she did n't know him."

"If it 's the wrong woman," sez I, "I 'm goin' to start to the North Pole to locate the fool-killer."

While I spoke, she started down the path slow and matter o' fact; and me an' Horace scuttled back to the look-out to be in time to see 'em come out at the bottom — providin' the Friar went on with her.

We did n't get there more 'n two minutes before they came out at the bottom; but it seemed a week. When they finally came into sight, the Friar was walkin' an' leadin' his hoss, and she was walkin' at his side about four feet from him with a big dog on each side of her. Just then we saw six Cross-branders ride in toward the corral.

"It looks calm an' quiet," drawled ol' Tank, his free eye bouncin' about like a rubber ball; "but I 'll bet two cookies again' the hole in a doughnut that we have a tol'able fair sized storm before mornin'."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE FRIAR GIVEN TWO WEEKS

As Friar Tuck and the woman came out of the mouth of the ravine, Ty Jones came out of the back door of the old cabin. He stopped a moment, lookin' at 'em, rubbed his eyes an' looked again. Then he walked towards 'em. He spoke somethin' to the Friar, and the Friar answered it. The woman did n't pay any heed at all; but went around the new cabin to the door which was on the other side. Three more Cross-branders rode in, and Ty Jones shook his fist at the Friar.

Ol' Tank was cussin' under his breath for comfort, but it did n't keep him from gettin' fidgetty. "Is n't the' no sort of a tool, Horace," he blurted out, "that 'll stretch out your hearin' the way these field glasses stretch out your eyesight? I 'd be willin' to have one of my ears run as wild as my free eye, forever after, if it could just hear, now, what Ty Jones is a-speakin' to the Friar. I 'm beginnin' to get nervous."

We all felt about the same way; but it was about two miles down to where they were, so all we could do was to watch.

Olaf had come with us, leavin' Oscar with Kit, and now Horace turned to him and said: "You and Promotheus know more about Ty Jones 'n the rest of us. I have never tried to pump Promotheus, but now I want you to tell us what you think he 'll do with the Friar."

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They said 'at Ty was generally purty cold blooded, and likely to take enough time in gettin' rid of a feller to make it purty hard to tell just how it had been done; but that when he once let go of himself, he did n't care what happened, and if the Friar angered him about the woman, the chances were 'at the Friar would never leave the ranch alive."

The shadows were beginnin' to fall, down in the valley; but Ty and the Friar kept on talkin', Ty wavin' his hands now and again, while the Friar stood straight with his hands hangin' easy at his side. I could n't stand it any longer.

"I believe 'at a feller could get almost to 'em without bein' seen, by goin' along the edge o' the ravine," sez I; "and I 'm goin' to do it. It 'll be dark in a few minutes. If you want me to hustle to the Friar, wave a torch up and down; if you want me to come back here, wave it sideways."

"I 'm goin', too," sez Horace.

"So 'm I," sez Olaf and The.

"Well, that 's full enough," sez I, "and the rest of ya keep a sharp watch, and also keep the hosses ready, in case we need 'em."

The four of us started down the side o' the slope at good speed. There were only two places on the way down where we caught sight o' the ranch buildin's; but just before we reached the top o' the cliff, we heard a sound down below in the ravine. Glancin' cautious over the side, I saw the Friar comin' back alone, on foot and leadin' his hoss.

I drew back and whispered to the others, and we felt purty blame cheap. We hardly knew what to do, as the Friar was likely to see us if we tried to run back to our look-out before he reached the place where the path came up out o' the ravine, and most of all, we did n't want him to know 'at we were follerin' him.

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He had passed us by this time, so we looked over the edge o' the ravine at him. He was walkin' slow with his head down, and his hands in his pockets. "He 'll ride home slow," sez I; "and we can easy beat him."

"Hush," sez The, draggin' us back from the edge, "the's two fellers follerin' him."

"Horace," I said, quick and firm, so as not to have any back-talk, "you go about forty yards up the ravine, and keep your eyes on these fellers. Don't shoot 'em unless they try to pass you. Hurry, now! I 've given you the most important post. If you shoot, shoot in earnest."

Horace stooped over and ran to where a rock jutted out. "Now, then," sez I, "as soon as these fellers pass us, we 'll try to bowl 'em over with one stone each, and then drop back out o' sight. We don't want to shoot unless we have to."

"They 're wavin' us to come back," whispered The, who had took a glance at our look-out.

"Never mind," sez I, lookin' down and seein' the two fellers crouched over and sneakin' after the Friar. "Now then, throw and drop back."

We stood on our knees, threw one stone each, and dropped back. They rattled in the ravine below, and we heard a sharp yelp of pain. I had only dodged away from the edge of the ravine and ran to where Horace was.

"One feller was hit in the shoulder and knocked down," sez he; "but he got up again right away, and both of 'em ran back."

"What did the Friar do?" I asked, not darin' to look over, lest he see me.

"He turned around and started back," sez Horace. "I was afraid he 'd see my head again' the sky, so I pulled it

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back. I have n't heard him move since those fellers started to run."

"Well, I don't believe 'at even the Friar would be daffy enough to go back," sez I; "so we 'll just lay here and listen. They signalled us from above a while back, but they 've stopped again."

We waited some time without hearin' any one pass us, and then we sneaked up along the edge of the ravine. Before long we saw the Friar come up the side. He paused on top and looked back, then mounted and started for Olaf's at a slow shuffle. As soon as he was well under way, we pushed for the look-out, and mounted.

"Slim, you and Tillte would n't be missed as soon as the rest of us; so you trail the Friar, while we try to beat him home," sez I. "If you need us, shoot. Otherwise come in as unnoticeable as you 're able."

We reached Olaf's, had our saddles off and the hosses turned loose before the Friar rode in. His face was white, but this was the only thing 'at showed what he was goin' through. We made a big fuss about his gettin' back all right and asked him plenty o' questions, without overdoin' it enough to make him suspicious. He answered our questions right enough, but he did n't open up and talk free. Slim and Tillte joined us at supper without bein' noticed.

After supper we gathered around the fire in Olaf's settin' room, and the Friar gave us a purty complete account of what had happened. He said that it was his old girl all right; but he said that the' was somethin' the matter with her, that she did n't recognize him even after he had made himself known to her. He said she seemed dazed-like and not to take any interest in anything.

He said they had walked down the ravine together, and

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she had told him that she was comfortable enough but not happy. That she had lost something which she could not find; but that she was getting stronger since havin' come out to the mountains. He said 'at when Ty Jones saw 'em together, he had carried on somethin' fierce, and had ordered her into the house. Then he had turned on the Friar and told him that he would give him two weeks to leave the state and after that his life would n't be safe in it. He said he had tried to reason with Ty; but it was n't any use; so he had just come away.

"If he had set upon you, would you have shot him?" asked Tank.

"I did n't have anything to shoot him with," sez the Friar. "I was careful to leave my weapons behind."

"Well, you did n't show much judgment in doin' it," sez Tank. "He might have sent a couple o' fellers after ya, and finished you out in the dark somewhere so 'at we never could 'a' proved it on him."

"I did think for a minute that some one was follerin' me," sez the Friar. "I heard a rattle of stones and a cry a few hundred feet behind me in the ravine; but I think it was some animal slippin' down the side."

"Like as not," sez Tank. "If it had been any o' Ty's gang, they would n't have give it up so easy; but another time we 'll some of us go along with you; so as to get your last words anyhow, if so be 'at you 're bent on suicide. What do you intend to do now?"

"That 's the worst of it," sez the Friar. "I don't know what to do. She said she did not think she was married; but she was not sure; and Ty refused to give me any satisfaction about it."

"Is n't the' any law out here, at all?" sez Horace. "Seems

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to me as though there ought to be some way to get at Ty Jones."

"What would you charge him with?" asked the Friar. "She is not being abused or kept a prisoner, she says she is comfortable and gettin' stronger — I can't think of any way to bring him under the law. If you had not taken the law into your own hands in regard to his two men, we might have made the claim that he was behind them in this; but really, I do not see where we have any just grounds to go to law."

"That little matter o' the Greasers don't hobble us none," sez ol' Tank. "Don't you get the idee that you 're bound in any way by this. The whole country would uphold us; so if you want to use it as a lever, just make your claims again' Ty to the law officers, and we 'll tell 'em 'at the Greasers confessed 'at Ty put 'em up to it."

This seemed to us like sage advice; and we all chipped in and urged the Friar to act on it. Laws are all right, I have n't a word to say again' laws. Fact is, I believe 'at we 're better off for havin' a few than not; but after all, laws come under the head of luxuries like diamonds and elevators and steam heat. We all know there is such things, and we have n't any objections to those usin' 'em who can afford it; but most of us have to wear cut-glass, pack in our own wood, do our climbin' on foot or hossback, and settle our troubles in our own way with as little bother as possible. When you figure it down to the foundation, laws depend on public opinion, not public opinion on laws; and all the public opinion worth takin' into account would have said 'at we had done the right thing with those Greasers. If they 'd 'a' tried to law us for a little thing like this, it would have started an upraisin' which would have let the law see how

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small a shadow it really does throw when it comes to a show-down.

The Friar did n't answer us right away, and when he did, it was in the most discouraged voice I 'd ever heard him use. " I 'm in the dark, boys," sez he, " I don't know what to do. Even if I could find some way to take her away from Ty Jones, I do not know what to do with her. She is not herself, she needs care and protection — and I am not in a position to supply them. I have an income of three hundred and fifty dollars a year, which is much more than enough for my own needs, for I live mostly upon the hospitality of my friends as you well know " — we also knew 'at he spent most of his money in helpin' those who never saw enough money to get on intimate terms with it; while all they gave him in return was a little meal and bacon for savin' their souls and doctor-bills. " I don't know what I could do for her, even if I had the right to take her away from him," continued the Friar. " My life has been a good deal of a failure; and I — "

" For the love o' common sense, Friar! " broke in Horace. " You don't seem to have the smallest degree o' judgment. You know mighty well 'at I 'm bothered to death to know what to do with my money. You get her if you can, send her to any sort of a sanitarium you want to, and I 'll foot the bills. Don't you ever sit around and whine about money in my presence again. It worries and disgusts and irritates me — and I came out here for rest. You talk about faith and takin' no heed for the morrow, and such things; but you act as though you were riskin' a man's soul when you gave him a chance to be of some little use in the world."

The Friar was purty well overcome at this; but figure on it the best we were able, we could n't see just how to

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get a man's wife away from him without provin' that he had abused her. It was a complication, any way we looked at it; so we all went to bed in the hope that one of us would have a lucky dream.

We did n't have any more idees next mornin' than we 'd had the night before; so after breakfast, the Friar took a walk and the rest of us sat around in bunches talkin' it over. About ten o'clock a feller named Joyce who lived about fifteen miles east of Olaf came by on his way for a doctor, his boy havin' been kicked above the knee and his leg broke. The Friar could patch up a human as good as any doctor; so we went after him, knowin' that this would be the best way to take his mind off his own troubles, and the' was a look o' relief in the Friar's face when he rode away with Joyce.

I never knew any feller yet who did n't spend a lot o' time wishin' he had a chance to loaf all the laziness out of his system; but the fact of the matter is, that work gives us more satisfaction than anything else. A wild animal's life is one long stretch after enough to eat; but he 's full o' health an' joy an' beauty. On the other hand, put one in a cage and feed it regular and it turns sick immediate. What we need is plenty o' the kind o' work we are fitted for — this is the answer to all our discontented feelin'; and what the Friar was best fitted for, was to help others.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

A CROSS FOR EVERY MAN

THINKIN', just plain thinkin', is about the hardest work the' is; and for the next several days, we lay around doin' mighty little else. The trouble was, 'at we could n't devise a way to put Ty Jones out o' business. He was n't an outlaw; fact was, he stood high with the big cattle men; and we got light headed tryin' to scare up a plan which would remove Ty in a decent manner, and leave the Friar free to take the woman without causin' him any conscience-pains. We were the mournfulest lookin' bunch o' healthy men ever I saw; and finally I decided to loaf with Kit and the kid, they not bein' expected to do any thinkin' and therefore havin' smooth an' pleasant faces.

Sometimes I wonder if women don't get along just as well without thinkin' as men do with it. I had n't talked seven minutes with Kit before she suggested just what I would have thought up if I 'd been able. She did n't even know she had suggested it; so I did n't call her attention to it for fear it might up-heave her vanity and give Olaf bother. I had a plan now and it was of such a nature that I was glad the Friar was n't there to mess into it.

I found Promotheus an' Tank lyin' on the grass along the crick. They were back to back, and their faces were so lined with genuwine thought, that they looked like a pair of overgrown nutmegs. I sat down beside 'em lookin' worried.

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Presently Tank sez: "What ya thinkin' about?"

I shook my head, and in about half an hour The asked the same question. I waited a minute, hove out a sigh, and sez: "Gee, I wish I was you."

"Why do you wish you was me?" sez he.

"'Cause," sez I, "you've got a chance to do the biggest deed I know of."

"What is it?" sez he, examinin' my face to see if I was sheepin' him.

"No," sez I, shakin' my head; "I ain't got any right to even think of it, let alone hint at it. You might think I was buttin' into your affairs, and then again — No, I refuse to suggest it. If it's your duty, you'll see it yourself; but I won't take the responsibility of pointin' it out."

"What in thunder did you mention it at all for, then?" sez The, gettin' curious an' exasperated.

"And then besides," sez I to myself, out loud, "there's Horace. Like as not he wouldn't allow you to run your head into danger any more."

"What!" yelled The. "Didn't we run our heads into danger all over the tropics of the Orient, didn't we goad up danger an' search for it and roust it out of its hidin' places and — Why, confound you —"

In about ten minutes I stopped him, an' sez in a quiet voice: "Well, then, if I was you, I'd go on down to Ty Jones's and take on with him again."

We lay on the grass there, along Pearl Crick for some time without speakin'. Up on the rim, the grass was burned to a crisp; but along the crick it was still green. Promotheus pulled blade after blade of it and chewed 'em up in his mouth, while me an' Tank watched him.

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"What you mean, is for me to take on with Ty Jones — and then to act spy on him. Ain't that what ya mean?" sez The after a time.

I 'd 'a' sooner he had n't put it into words — it did look rather raw when he stood it up before us naked. "I don't mean nothin' in particular, The," sez I. "You and I are different, and what I could do without feelin' —"

"That 's all right," he broke in. "The' ain't any need to treat me like an infant baby. Come right out with it — What you want me to do is to play spy, ain't it?"

"That 's the only way I can see to help the Friar," sez I; "but he would n't want you to do anything for him you did n't feel was right."

"I know, I know," he sez, lookin' down at his hands. "Ty Jones is as mean as a snake, and I don't deny it; but he 's been square with me, and once he saved my life. Then again, the Friar has been square with every one, and if he had n't nursed me night and day, Horace would n't have had a chance to save my life. If Horace had killed me it would have spoiled his life; so that the whole thing is held together in a tangle. I 'm willin' to cash in my life for the Friar — it ain't that — but I do hate to turn again' Ty Jones underhanded."

"Better just forget I mentioned it," sez I.

"No," sez Promotheus, "I intend to lay the plan before Horace, and let him settle on it."

"That 's a good scheme, that 's the best way out of it," sez ol' Tank, and I joined in with him.

We sat there on the bank a long time, thinkin' the thing over, and finally just before supper, Horace hove in sight and started to josh us; but when he saw how sober we were, he settled down, and asked us what was up.

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"Horace," sez The, "what would you think of my takin' on with Ty Jones, and playin' the spy on him?"

"That would be madness!" exclaimed Horace. "He'd see through it and kill you first pop. I don't know though — you might fix up a tale — but then it would be too infernal risky. Nope, don't you try it."

"If it could be done," persisted The, "what would you think of it?"

"Oh, it would be a great thing for the Friar," sez Horace; "but, Promotheus, I don't like to have you take the risk."

"It ain't the risk I 'm fussin' about," sez The. "Ty was square to me in his own way. The Friar has been square to me also, and I know 'at his way is the best; but at the same time — don't you think it would be downright snakish for me to go back to Ty, tell him some excuse for my stayin' away, and then plot again' him while I 'm eatin' his vittles?"

It did n't sound good to us when Promotheus came out with it so everlastin' unpolluted; but he had worked up a sense of honesty since bein' with Horace, which would n't let him do any pertendin'. Horace did n't answer, and he went on after waitin' a minute: "I have n't any prejudices again' fightin' him in the open; but it does go again' my grain to wear a dog hide when I 'm playin' wolf, and Ty Jones was square to me."

"Well," sez Horace, "I have n't the heart to advise you to do this, Promotheus. We 'll sure be able to find some other way, and as long as it goes again' your grain the way it does, I don't want you to do it."

"Would you think any the less of me if I did?" asked The, his eyes takin' on a sad, hungry look, like a dog's eyes get when he 's worried over what his master 'll say about some trick he 's been up to.

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"Course I would n't think any less of ya," sez Horace without hesitatin'; "but hang it, I 'm afraid somethin' 'll happen to ya."

"Would the Friar think any the less of me?" sez The.

"If the Friar heard about it, he would n't let ya go," sez Horace.

"I 've puzzled more about the Friar 'n about airy other man I ever saw," sez The, thoughtful. "I wanted to lynch Olaf that time, guilty or not guilty; but the Friar straightened things out by riskin' his own soul. He hates lynchin', it goes square again' his grain; but he made a bet with us to help stretch Olaf if we could prove him guilty; and this has stuck with me. This was a big thing to do, and I 'd like to do somethin' big for the Friar — But I swear it would hurt me to spy on Ty Jones!"

We did n't have anything to say on the subject; so we just sat and chewed grass.

"I 've been thinkin' about that old Greek feller, 'at you named me after," sez Promotheus at last. "He did n't ask no one else to take the responsibility of tellin' him what to do. He just decided what was right, and then did it. If I go to Ty Jones, and he treats me right, my own thoughts 'll tear at me like vultures; but this here other Promotheus, he stood it, 'cause it was for man's good; and I 'm game to do the same.

"I don't intend to be any more sneakier 'n I have to be. All I intend to do is to find out what I can about the woman, and, if Ty ain't treatin' her right, to help get her away from him; but I want it understood right now that I 'm not goin' to work any tricks on Ty to get him into the law for what he 's done in bygone days. Now then, I take all the blame on my own shoulders; but we 'll have to fix

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up a tale to fool a wise one, 'cause Ty won't be took in by chaff."

We talked things over a long time; but it seemed mighty unreasonable for Promotheus to have pulled out without sayin' a word, and then to come back without writin' in the meantime; and we could n't quite hit on it. Finally the idee came to me.

"They 're goin' to graze the grass down to the roots, this summer," sez I; "but still, the' won't be enough to go around. A lot o' cattle will have to be sold off early, and some will be trailed up into Montana, and cow-punchers are goin' to be in demand. Ty is long on cattle and short on grass, and he 'll be glad to have extra help he can trust; so he won't question ya too close. You tell him 'at Horace here was a government agent, and that he arrested you as a deserter, and took you to prison where you was given a life sentence; that you broke out a couple o' months ago, and have been workin' your way back as cautious as you could."

"My Lord, I hate to tell him that!" sez The. "It 's too infernal much like what I told him the first time."

"You got to make up a good story, or else give up your plan," sez I.

"Yes, that 's so," he agreed. "Ty 'd believe that, too. What prison had I better say I 've been in?"

"Which one was you in?" sez I.

"I never was in any government prison," sez he. "I was in a state prison."

"Have ya ever seen a government prison?" sez I.

"Yes, I 've seen two, one in Kansas, and one in Frisco," sez he.

"Which would be the hardest to get out of?" sez I.

"The one in Frisco; it 's on an island," sez he.

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"Choose that one," sez I; "and make up your escape just as it might have happened."

"Ty won't haggle me with questions," sez The sadly. "He 'll just believe me, an' this 'll make it ten times as hard."

"You ought to be paler an' more haggard," sez I; "but I doubt if the's a way to do it."

"Keep soakin' his face in hot towels for a few days," sez Horace. "That 'll bleach him out."

"Are ya goin' foot or hossback?" sez I.

"I stole a hoss down in Texas the last time I came," sez he, "and traded him off when he got footsore."

"We got some hosses with a Nevada brand, over at the Dot," sez I. "I 'll slip over an' get one while you 're havin' your complexion bleached off. They broke out an' got with the herd before we finished brandin' 'em, and we just let it go. The chances are they have n't been rebranded yet."

"All right," sez The. "If I 'm to do it at all, I want it to go through; but I have an idee 'at those vultures pickin' at my liver are goin' to be mighty unpleasant company."

Me an' Spider Kelley, Tillte Dutch an' Mexican Slim rode over to the Dot and found two o' those Nevada hosses, still rangin' with their old brands untouched; so we roped one, and came back with it, without havin' word with any of the outfit. The Diamond Dot range was the best of any we rode over, and they had put up a lot o' hay that summer; but still I felt sure 'at they would have to cut down purty close, though I knew 'at Jabez would hold as many as he could for a high price the followin' year.

We found The's complexion purty well stewed out and haggard, Kit havin' put soda in the hot water; so I told him to play sick, and loaf around the house as long as possible. He agreed to it; but the' was a settled look o' regret in his

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face which was a heap different from the one he had wore when he dismounted from the stage at Bosco.

"Night and day," sez I, "the'll be at least two of us at the look-out, and you come up with any news you have. Get into the habit of whistlin' Horace's tune; so that if ever you 'd want to warn us to vamose rapid, you can whistle it. You might ride that way with some o' Ty's outfit, or somethin'."

"It 's not likely," sez he. "The's no range up that way, and no trail leadin' near it; but you fellers want to scatter your tracks all you can, so as not to make a path."

We made plans for all the unexpected details we could think up; and then he started forth one night, meanin' to circle to the southwest, and come in from that direction. He wore a red handkerchief under his nose as if to shut out the dust; but shaved clean, and pale as he was, mighty few would have recognized him either as Badger-face, or as the feller what had come in with us a few weeks before. We all shook hands solemn when he left, and promised to be at the look-out the followin' night, and to be there steady from that on.

"What makes you fellers trust me?" sez he just as he started. "I came down here to put Olaf out o' business, and then I turned over to your side. Now I 'm goin' back to Ty's. What makes you think I won't turn again' ya, if I get into a tight place?"

Horace went over and took his hand. "Promotheus," sez he, "I 've been with you through hot days and cold nights, I 've been with you through hunger and thirst and danger; and I 'd trust you as long as I 'd trust myself. You 're not goin' to Ty's because you 're a traitor. You 're goin' because

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you 're a changed man, and the new man you 've become is willin' to risk his life for what he thinks is right. No matter what happens, I 'll trust ya; so take that along to think over."

Promotheus winked his eyes purty fast, then he gave a sigh and rode off into the night. The' was n't the hint of a smile about his lips, nor a glint o' gladness in his eyes; but somethin' in the straight way 'at he held his back let ya know 'at the inside man of him was finally at peace with what the outside man was doin' — and if ya don't know what that means, the's no way to tell ya.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE FRIAR A COMPLICATION

We all felt purty down-hearted after Promotheus had rode away, and we sat before the fire in Olaf's settin' room a good deal the same as if we were holdin' a wake.

"Olaf," I sez, "you can't have any finicky notions about treatin' Ty Jones square, after all the persecutin' he 's handed you. Do you know anything on him you could have him sent to prison for?"

Olaf shook his head. "He 's too clever to get caught in a trap," sez he. "He scarcely ever gave any orders to have things done. He 'd just say aloud as though talkin' to himself, that some one or other was in his way; and then his men would begin to take spite on that feller. If the calf tally showed a hundred percent increase, he would think that about right, and no questions; but if ever it fell short o' what he expected, we had it to make up some way. He 'd send us out until we had brought in enough to satisfy; but he 'd never give us straight orders to rustle. He is a smart man. When one of his men got into trouble, he got him out, no matter what cost; but he expected his men to do what he wanted, without askin' questions. He has no fear, none at all. I know, I have seen. He has no fear, and he is very strong. It is bad to be at war with him; but I should like to have my hands at his throat once, and none to interfere."

"Maybe you will, Olaf," sez I, "maybe you will; and I don't mind sayin' that I hope to be on hand to see it."

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We kept two men allus at the look-out with Horace's field glasses. It was a queer sort o' summer, the air was n't clear like it usually is, but hazy, as though full o' dust; and in lots of places they were turnin' stock on the grass they generally aimed to save for winter. There were only a few punchers around the Cross brand ranch houses; but we saw Promotheus every day. He hobbled about with a stick part o' the time, holdin' his hand on his back as though he had the rheumatiz, which was natural enough from bein' shut up in an island prison. Some days we saw the woman; but she never came up the ravine path any more.

Promotheus did n't make a report to us for about a week. Then he came out one night about eleven. He said 'at Ty had n't doubted a word he 'd said; but had done everything possible to make him comfortable, tellin' him to just loaf until he got in good order. He said 'at Ty and the woman did n't have much to do with each other and had n't had since she 'd come out. He said 'at the woman was kind to all the animals, in spite of everything 'at Ty could do, and the dogs was gettin' to act like regular, ordinary dogs. He said all but a few new pups had remembered him, and one had even wagged his tail, though he could n't see any sense in this, he never havin' as much as spoke a kind word to the dog, so far as he could recollect.

He said he had held several talks with Ty, and Ty had asked him if he thought 'at Olaf was in league with any big outfits. He said 'at he had told Ty that he was sure Olaf had been in league with 'em several years before, but o' course, he could n't know anything o' what had happened since. Ty said he had come to the conclusion that Olaf was set out for a kind of bait to draw him into trouble, which was why he had let him alone; but that he was short o' grass this season,

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and wanted Pearl Crick Spread bad. He also told The about the two Greasers disappearin', though he was n't sure what had happened to 'em. He knew about us bein' over at Olaf's off and on, and The warned us to be careful, as Ty expected to have Olaf's place watched as soon as he got through movin' several bands o' cattle.

The said 'at the woman had a soft spot for any dumb brute, or even a human in distress, and that he had touched her by hobblin' around with the stick. He said she had cooked him some flabby invalid-food with her own hands, and that it was mighty captivatin'. He said she did n't speak much; but he was tryin' his best to get on the good side of her. He said 'at all the boys claimed 'at Ty treated her well; but did n't seem to care much for her. Horace did n't happen to be with us when The came; but we said we 'd move our camp higher up on the slope, to be on the safe side when Olaf's was watched, and would have Horace on deck sure the next time The came out; and we did this the next day.

The land was all slashed an' twisted around and broken, up west o' the Cross brand ranch houses. The ravine leadin' down to 'em ran east and west, the path leadin' up out of it to the trees where we had first seen the woman was n't near so steep as the one comin' out of it on the north side toward the clump o' rocks. After the north path came out, the ravine narrowed down until it was n't more than a crack, the south side not risin' so high as on the north; so that soon the north side stood up like a cliff above the land leadin' down to the clump of trees, and the only way we could get over to it was to go down the ravine and up again on the other side.

We made our camp consid'able higher than our look-out had been, and it was a well sheltered spot. An easy slopin'

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stretch led up to it from the north, and a ledge skirted the face o' the cliff up back of it, to the south. We examined this some distance; but it did n't seem to lead anywhere. We found several dips back in the hills where the snow water made grazin' for our ponies, and we were as comfortable as it 's ever possible to be while waitin'.

I know what my plan would be for makin' a hell which would be punishment for any mortal sin, and yet not severe enough to make me hate all the peace out o' my own existence. I 'd make the wicked sit in the dark for a hundred years, waitin' to hear what their sentence was. Then, I 'd let 'em into heaven, and I bet they would be in a fair way to appreciate it. I never met up with any one able to outwait me without showin' it more 'n I did; but I 'll wager what I got, that the suspense was gorin' into me worse 'n into them, all the time.

One evenin', me an' Tank went up to camp after doin' our stunt at the look-out, and as we went, we caught sight o' two riders headin' our way. We hastened along so as to be ready to move in case this was a pair we did n't care to draw to; but by the time we reached camp, they were close enough to recognize as the Friar and Olaf. The plan was to keep the Friar in the dark as long as possible, and we waited their comin' with consid'able interest.

The Friar had squeezed the whole thing out of Olaf, as we might have known he would. You could n't trust Olaf with a secret where the Friar was concerned. Tank, now, would have sent the Friar off to Bosco or Laramie as contented as a bug; but just as soon as Olaf was backed into a corner, he told the truth, and spoiled all our arrangements.

The Friar rode into our camp, dismounted, threw his reins to the ground, and sez: " Where is Promotheus? "

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We looked at Olaf, and he nodded his head as sheepish as the under dog at a bee-swarmin'. "He 's down at the ranch," sez Horace.

"Has he brought any news?" asked the Friar. So we told him all 'at The had reported. He took a few steps up and down, ponderin'.

"I can't permit this," he said after a minute. "He is riskin' his life down there, and I can't allow him to continue."

The rest all joined in and argued with him; but he was as obstinate as a burro, once he got his back up; so I did n't say anything. I went off and started to eat my supper. When I was about half through, Horace came over and said the Friar was bent on goin' down to Ty's himself. "Well, let him go," sez I as cool as a snow-slide.

"Yes, but if he goes, Ty will kill both him and Promotheus!" sez Horace raisin' his voice. I noticed the others headin' toward us so I only flung my hands into the air, meanin' that it was none o' my business.

"Do you mean to say 'at you back the Friar up in this?" demanded Horace.

"Do I look like a fool?" sez I. The Friar's eyes were on me, and I knew they were cold; but I pertended not to notice him.

"You don't look like a fool; but you act like one," sez Horace, gettin' riled.

"You can't blame me, Horace," I sez in my most drawly voice, "because the Friar cares more for havin' his own way than he does for human life."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded the Friar.

"Oh, nothin'," sez I, "except that if you go down there, it shows Promotheus up at once, we 'd all have to go along

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to save Promotheus, and this would start a fight, with us to blame; and no one knowin' what the woman is, or how she stands in the matter. She seems perfectly satisfied with Ty Jones; and no matter how it turned out, all of us who survived would have to leave the country. I don't intend to argue with you, or to cross you in any way; but I do intend to stand by Promotheus, as it was me who first put the idee into his head."

I sympathized with the Friar, I knew that he was n't himself. To find the woman he loved in the hands of the man who hated him, after all the years he had been in suspense about her was enough to tip any one off his balance; and I also knew the Friar. He had trained himself for eternity so long that some of his earthly idees were n't sound, and the surest way to bring him to himself was to let him bark his knees a time or two. Some imported hosses carry their gaze so high they can't see their footin' but after they 've stepped into a few prairie-dog holes, they learn to take a little more interest in what they 're treadin' on.

The Friar came over and looked down at me. "I shall wait until Promotheus comes up here, and then he can stay; and I shall go down," said the Friar in the voice a man uses when he thinks it 's wrong to show the sarcasm he can't help but feel. "Have you any objection to this?"

"I have no objection to anything you choose to do, Friar," I said, finishin' my supper.

"Do I understand that you approve?" sez he.

"Certainlee not," sez I. "Ty would see the connection between you and Promotheus at once. He knows 'at The was a deserter, and he would set the law on him in one direction, and try to run him down on his own hook in the other. If you had been on hand while we were discussin' the plan,

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you would have had the right to veto it; but now, it looks to me as though Promotheus was the one to consider."

The Friar sat down and ran his hands through his hair. "I can't see any way out!" he sez at last; "but I 'm forced to admit that since Promotheus has gone down there, it would put him in danger for me to interfere."

"Well," sez ol' Tank, "here is The himself. Now, we 'll know better what to do."

We looked up, and there was Promotheus with a bruise over his eye, comin' into our little nook.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

A SIDE-TRIP TO SKELTY'S

We all crowded around him, thinkin' 'at the bruise betokened some sort of trouble; but he said he 'd got afraid they 'd begin to suspicion him; so he had tried to ride a hoss that day, and had let it buck him off. He said the' was n't much lettin' needed, as it had been a mean one; but he had got his forehead grazed, and had lain on the ground, claimin' his back was hurt. It was only about eight o'clock, and we wondered how he had the nerve to come so early; but he said they were havin' a drinkin' bout over havin' dogged a feller by the name o' Bryce off his claim on Ice Crick, thus gettin' a new outlet to grass and water.

He said the woman had been mighty good to him after his fall; but that he could n't get her to talk about herself at all. "Have you ever mentioned the name of Carmichael to her?" I asked.

"No," sez he, "why should I?"

"That 's the Friar's name," sez I. "He used to preach in a regular church down east, and she sang in the choir. Next time you get a chance, try to draw her out about this."

The Friar told him a lot o' small details to ask her about; and went part way back with him, as he would n't stay long for fear o' bein' missed. The Friar insisted on stayin' along with us, while Olaf went back to the Spread.

Two nights after this Promotheus came up to our camp again. He said he had had several talks with her, and that

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she remembered the names and places, all right, but insisted that Carmichael was dead. She said he often came to her in her dreams; but that she knew he had died long ago.

"Does she ever sing?" asked the Friar.

"Never," sez The. "She don't even talk much. She has some sort of a pain in her head, and sometimes she seems to wander; but at other times she is perfectly clear."

"Is Ty Jones ever mean to her?" asked the Friar.

"Never," sez The. "Ty ain't mean to those about him. He has his own idees — he likes to have his men and dogs and hosses all fierce and nervy — but he 's not mean to 'em. And all the boys treat her respectful, too. Fact is, I don't see where we got any grounds to take her away."

"But she does not care for him," sez the Friar; "she could not care for him! He must have used trick or force to bring her here; and you must find out the truth about it. It all depends on you, now."

"I 'm doin' all I can, Friar," sez The; "but it 's a hard tangle to see through."

When he left to go back, me an' the Friar and Horace went with him. "Supposin' they should see you comin' back?" sez the Friar.

"Well," sez The, "Ty don't keep his men in prison, and I 'd tell 'em I was up takin' a little air after bein' shut away from it so long."

"Supposin' they got suspicious an' follered ya?" asked the Friar.

"I try to be as careful as I can," sez The; "but I own up I allus feel a bit nervous till I get back to my bunk."

"The best plan is for one of us to wait where the path leads down into the ravine each night at eleven," sez the

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Friar. "We could go at ten and wait until twelve. If we went any closer, the dogs might get scent of us."

We agreed 'at this would be the best plan; and after this, two of us made it a point to spend a couple of hours waitin' there, while the rest stayed at the look-out ready to hustle down if the' was any excitement; but nothin' happened and we got purty fidgetty.

"Tank," sez I one afternoon, "let 's ride over to Skelty's. The's generally some Cross-branders there, and perhaps we can find a little amusement."

We reached there about seven, and ordered supper. There were five Cross-branders there already, eatin' and drinkin'; and one of 'em was the tall feller by the name o' Dixon. I nodded to him when I sat down and he nodded back. It 's funny the way a man feels when he goes into an unfriendly place to measure an' be measured. It 's not like fear, that is, not like panicky fear; but still I suppose it's something like what a jack-rabbit feels when the hounds are strung out after him. He knows well enough what 'll happen if he can't run fast enough — but then he takes a heap of exhilaration in the thought that he most certainly can run fast enough.

All those fellers knew something o' me an' ol' Tank; while Dixon was the only one we knew, the rest bein' mostly young chaps who had taken on with Ty durin' the last few years; but as most o' Ty's men were trailed out o' some other state by a posse, it was a safe bet that they had more or less rattler blood in 'em. They were all on friendly terms with the girls, and the girls called 'em by name, whenever they could n't think up some other term 'at suited their taste better. One o' these young fellers still had a boy's eyes; but most o' their eyes were purty hard an' chilly.

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I never did set any store on havin' a strange woman call me "dear"; and neither did ol' Tank. With his eye runnin' wild, and his mussed-up features, the term dear fitted him about as snug as false bangs an' face-powder would; but one o' these young hussies came over an' stood behind his chair, and sez: "Why hello, dearie, where have you been all the time?"

"I 've been over teachin' my grandchildren how to play the pianer," sez Tank. "Have you got any pork an' beans?"

Most any girl knows 'at most any man 'll stand for most anything; so this one grabbed hold o' Tank's hair and gave it a pull; but she savvied 'at he did n't have any love for her, so she brought in his grub, threw it down in front of him, and went back to soft-soapin' the feller with a boy's eyes. He was still young enough to feel flattered by it, and truth to tell, she was n't a bad lookin' girl, except that she drenched a feller so constant with her feminine charms that she washed away any hankerin's for 'em he might have had to begin with.

Any healthy woman has all the allurement she can possibly need, if she 'll just take care of it. I like to see a hoss full o' fire, and I like to see a woman full of enticement; but I like to see both the fire an' the enticement kept under good control, and not made to show out unnecessary.

Once, when I was in Frisco, I saw a parade of the Friendly Order of Hindu Cats, and the Grand Thomas Cat o' Creation rode in front on an old gray hoss. This hoss had feet like worn-out brooms, and the' was knots all over his legs. All he asked in the way of entertainment was to pass a peaceful day in a quiet stable, face to face with a bale of hay; but they had clipped his mane an' tail, hung a beaded belt across

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his brisket, put a scarlet blanket on him, and jabbed him with spurs until he was irritated to a degree.

The feller ridin' him had learned to ride in a barber's chair; but he had a heavy frown, and a lot o' gold lace, and a big canoe-shaped hat; and I have to admit that if they had tied him fast to the saddle, and put rubber spurs on him, he would have looked the part like a picture. Every time he 'd see one of his friends he 'd stab the hoss on the off side, then jerk back on the curb, and smile benevolent, as though he intended to save the populace from that fiery steed or sprain every bone in his face.

The old gray was as forgivin' a hoss as I ever see; but he had his limits as well as the rest of us. For the first ten or fifteen blocks, he 'd only swish his tail and prance when his rider jabbed him an order for a little more fire; but finally his flanks got touchy, and his sense o' justice began to write the declaration of independence on his patience. This would have been the time an intelligent human would have traded off his spurs for an apple or a lump o' sugar, or some other welcome little peace-offerin'; but just then the parade passed under a window jammed full o' the Grand Thomas Cat's closest friends, and o' course, they had to see a little fire.

He straightened out his legs, and then clamped the spurs into the old gray's flanks. I had fought my way through the crowd for fifteen squares just to see it happen, and it was well worth it. The gray was stiff and awkward, but in his youth he had taken a few lessons in buckin', and what he lacked in speed and practice, he made up in earnestness. The Thomas Cat did n't know any more about balancing than a ball, and the grip of his knees would n't have put a dent in a pullet's egg; the' was no horn to the saddle, and the mane

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had been clipped, so all he had to hang on with was the spurs and the curb bit; and things certainly did happen.

The old gray pitched and kicked and reared and backed and snorted and got mixed up with flags and citizens and umbrellas and red-lemonade stands and policemen; until finally he scraped off the Grand Thomas Cat of Creation on an awning, and tore off home, jumpin' and kickin'; while the population threw their hats in the air and yelled their palates loose. They threw fruit and popcorn and friendly advice at the Grand Cat as he hung from the awning; but friend or foe, the' was n't a soul in that crowd to help him get down; so as soon as he got calm enough to remember what he was, he dropped the three feet to the sidewalk, and ran into the store and hid.

If ya want to fill a crowd with content and satisfaction and joy and felicity and such-like items, just have some terrible accident happen to a popular hero, and all the joy-wells 'll overflow and gush forth like fountains — But what made me think o' this little incident was the fact that this girl at Skelty's put the spurs to her feminine charms a leetle too continuous.

Dixon, the Cross-brander, was one o' these lean, skinny ones, and as a rule, I don't crave to make their acquaintance. His Adam's apple ran up and down in his neck like a dumb-waiter, and the' was plenty o' distance for consid'able of a run. If ya looked at just the part of him between his chin and his shoulders, he resembled an ostrich, chokin' on an orange; but I decided to be as friendly as possible; so as soon as I 'd filled a cigarette paper, I offered him my sack o' tobacco. He took it, and while he was rollin' himself a cigarette, he sez: "I see you 've cut loose from your preacher."

"Nope," sez I, "he cut loose from me."

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"How come you fellers spend so much time out this way?" sez he.

"Nice country and pleasant folks," sez I.

"I 've heard tell 'at you got so familiar over at the Diamond Dot, that the old man turned ya loose," sez he. "Is the' anything to it?"

I did n't reply at once. My first impulse was to see if I could n't pull him and his Adam's apple apart; for this was n't no accident. This was a studied insult, and every one there was watchin' to see what would happen; but the' was too much at stake; so I gripped myself until I had time to put that remark where it would n't run any risk o' spoilin'; and then I sez: "Well, I don't just like to have it put that way; but I will admit that you have n't missed it so terrible far."

"Lookin' for a job?" sez he.

"Oh, I 'm not carin' much," sez I. "I 'm thinkin' some o' takin' a homestead, or buyin' some other feller out; but I ain't in any hurry. I may go on down into Texas, or take on again up here. Any chance for a job with your outfit?"

Durin' the time I had been decidin' on what I 'd say, Dixon had been wonderin' how I 'd take it; and I don't doubt he was some relieved. Anyway, he thawed out a little. "Nope, I hardly think so," sez he. "We 've been hard pushed for grass this season; but Ty bought a water-right on Ice Crick, and things has smoothed out again. Another thing is, that Badger-face has come back."

I gave a start as natural as life, and I did n't put it on, neither. I had no idy he 'd mention Badger-face without a lot o' pumpin'. "Badger-face?" sez I. "Good Lord, I thought he was dead!"

"Well, we thought so, too," sez Dixon. "We had n't

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heard a word from him; but he showed up a while back, and as soon as he gets able, he 'll take to ridin' again."

"What 's wrong with him?" sez I.

"He 's purty well played out," sez Dixon. "He sez 'at that feller, Bradford, is some sort of a government agent. Now, we ain't got nothin' again' the government out this way, so long as it minds its own business; but when it gets to interferin' with our rights, why it generally has to find a new agent. You were along with this feller, Bradford, when he scooped in Badger-face; and I doubt if that has slipped Badger's mind yet. Badger's memory for such things used to be purty reliable."

"Well, if it comes to that," sez I, "I 'd rather have Badger-face on my trail than Dinky Bradford; though I own up, I don't just know what government position Dinky holds."

"Ol' man Williams there was along with ya, too, was n't he?" sez Dixon.

"Sure he was," sez I. "We got a heap better paid, for that trip 'n we usually get."

"Yes," sez he, slow an' drawly, "but a feller can never tell when he 's all paid out for such a trip as that."

"A feller has to take chances in everything," sez I. "I still got a little money left to amuse myself with."

"It don't seem to make ya reckless," sez he. Dixon had been drinkin' purty freely, and I rather liked the effect liquor had on him.

"Maxwell," I called, "this is a dry summer. Set up the drinks for the house." Some saloon-keepers fawn on ya as if they 'd melt the money out o' your clothes while some of 'em are cold and haughty, as though it was an insult to offer 'em money. Maxwell was one o' this kind. He glared his

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red eyes at me as if I 'd been rude; but he set out the drinks all right.

Tank had been shut away from drink for so long that I had plumb forgot how he had happened to win his title; but as soon as I had give the order, I sensed that he was in the mood to sluice himself out thorough. The very minute we had cooled off from the drinks — Maxwell kept a brand o' poison which would eat holes in an iron kettle, if you let it set five minutes — Well, the very instant the steam had stopped comin' out of our mouths, Tank ordered a round; and before that had got on good terms with the first drink, Spider Kelley had arrived.

Mexican Slim had guessed where we were headin' for, and Tank had owned up to it, and Slim had told Spider, and, o' course, Spider had n't been able to stay behind; so when he stuck his nose in the door, Tank sez 'at the drinks was always on the last-comer, and Spider ordered a round.

I can journey about with a fair amount o' booze, without lettin' it splash over into my conversation; but I was there on business, so I drank as short drinks as would seem sociable. Tank, on the other hand, had formerly been as immune to liquor as a glass bottle; but he was out o' practice without realizin' it; and he splashed into Maxwell's forty-rod as though he was a trout hurryin' back to his native element. Spider was a wise old rat, and he played safe, the same as me. O' course, the Cross-branders could n't stand by and see us purchase Maxwell's entire stock, without makin' a few bids themselves; so for a while, we peered at the ceiling purty tol'able frequent.

The young feller with the boy's eyes was chin-ful to begin with, the other three Cross-branders were purty well calloused to a liberal supply o' turpentine; while Dixon would

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load up his dumb-waiter and send it down as unconcerned as though his throat was a lead pipe, connectin' with an irrigation ditch. He had reached the stage where he was reckless but not thoughtless, and the' did n't seem any way to wash him down grade any farther.

" Any more o' you fellers liable to drop in? " sez he, lookin' at me. I waved my hand towards Spider, as though he, bein' the last to arrive, would have the latest news; and Spider sez: " Nope, I reckon not. Leastwise, not so far as I know."

" Badger-face has come back and taken on with Ty again," sez I.

" The hell he has! " exclaimed Spider, just as I knew he would.

" Yes," sez Dixon with an evil chuckle, " he 's come back, and I doubt if he 'd feel any sorrow at meetin' up with some o' you boys."

" As far as I remember," sez ol' Tank, bulkin' up as ponderous as a justice o' the peace, " I don't recall havin' asked Badger's permission to do anything in the past, and I don't intend to begin now."

" Well," sez Dixon, " I don't mind tellin' ya that Ty Jones ain't so sure o' Badger as he used to be; and nothin' would suit him so well as to see Badger cut loose and get some o' you fellers for helpin' to have him railroaded."

This surprised me. Dixon did n't seem a shade worse 'n he 'd been when Spider arrived, but he 'd sure enough leaked out the news I was after. Ty was suspicious o' Promotheus, and we 'd have to finish our job as soon as possible. I did n't want to start anything at Skelty's so I proposed a little friendly poker. The Kid was asleep in the corner; so the seven of us played stud for an hour or so

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until Tank fell out of his chair, and then we broke up for the night.

Tank was all in; so we had to put him to bed, and the Kid had to be put to bed, also; but Dixon and the other three took a final drink and started back to Ty's.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

PROMOTHEUS IN THE TOILS

TANK weighed like a beef when he got liquor-loose, and it was all me and Spider could do to get him to bed. His legs were like rubber; but he insisted on tellin' us what he thought about things. He begged us to start back and let him ride, sayin' that it was only the heat o' the room, not the drink, which had upset him; but he was in no shape to ride a hay wagon, so we put him to bed.

"I think more o' the Friar than of airy other man I know," he sez to us at the head o' the stairs; "but I own up 'at I don't take kindly to religion; and I 'll tell ya why. The's hundreds an' dozens of hymns to the doggone sheep-herders; but the' ain't one single one to the cow-punchers. Now, what I sez is this, if ya want to round me up in a religion, you got to find one 'at has hymns to cattle men."

We did n't bother to explain it to him, 'cause he was n't in condition to know a parable from a pair o' boots. We dragged him along the hall and flung him on his bed. By chance we put him on the bed with his boots on the piller; but he went sound asleep the moment he stretched out; so we just hung his hat on his toe, folded the blanket over him, locked the door, put the key in my pocket, and went across the hall to our own room.

I did n't want to harbor that liquor any longer 'n I had to, so me an' Spider slipped down, got some salt an' mustard, soaked it in water, drenched ourselves — and repented of

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havin' been such fools. Then we went up to bed. It had been some time since we had stretched out on springs, and we were cordial for sleep; so we mingled with it in short order.

Still, I was n't easy in my mind, and twice I woke up and went into the hall; but I could n't hear anything, though I had a feelin' that the'd been some good cause for my wakin' up. I lay on the bed the last time with my mind made up to watch. Skelty's had allus had the name o' bein' a tough joint, and this red-eyed Maxwell with his Injun hair was n't of the kind to purify it to such an extent that the old customers would n't feel at home.

As I lay there, I saw the window rise, slow and careful. The' was n't any moon; but I could see a hand in the starlight. I made up my mind to sneak out o' bed, grab the hand, pull it in to the shoulder, and then throw all my weight on it, and yell for Spider. I got up as noiseless as cider turnin' into vinegar — and then upset a confounded chair, which sounded like two houses runnin' together.

The window dropped with a bang; and at the same moment the' came a shriek from across the hall, followed by some scufflin' and the sound o' broken glass. After this all we heard was Tank's voice tryin' to explain his opinion o' that part o' the country and all its inhabitants. I had thought that Tank had discarded most of his profanity; but by the time we had got our guns and crossed the hall to him, I changed my mind. When I put the key in the lock, he suggested to us what was likely to happen to any unfriendly individuals who attempted to enter that particular room.

I told him gently to stuff the piller into his mouth, if he could n't find any other way to stop his yappin'; and then I unlocked the door, just as Maxwell and his bartender came

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into the hall. The bartender had one gun and one candle, and Maxwell had two guns.

When we opened the door, there was Tank with the blood runnin' down his leg, while he stood in a corner of the room holdin' his weapon up above his shoulder. "What 's the matter with you?" I sez, a little cross.

"I 'm homesick, you blame ijiot!" sez Tank. "What else would likely be the matter with me?" Tank was about as far out o' humor as I ever saw him get.

Maxwell came in and looked at the pool of blood. "Don't stand there and bleed on the floor," sez he.

Tank looked at him baleful. "What do ya wish me to do — upset your rotten dive and bleed on the ceilin'?" sez he. "I did n't come here determined to smear up your place with my life blood; and I want ya to understand that I did n't punch this hole in myself simply to cool off. I know what you 're afraid of — You 're scared that some o' your liquor has got into my blood, an' that it 'll leak out and set your floor on fire."

"You run get a bucket for him to bleed into," sez Maxwell to the bartender.

"Yes," sez Tank, sarcastic; "and be sure to get a big one, as I am minded to draw off all o' my blood, just to see how much I have in me at this time o' the year."

Sayin' which, Tank walked over an' sittin' on the bed, held out his boot for me to pull off. He had been stabbed through the leg, through the thick part o' the calf, and a jet was spoutin' out of the top cut, and a steady stream oozin' from the bottom one. I put my finger knuckle above the top jet, and the palm of my other hand over the lower one, and then sent Maxwell after a small rope and some bandages.

While he was gone, a couple o' the girls strolled down

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the hall to see what the excitement was; but Tank began to lecture about morals and manners, and they did n't bother us long. We patched Tank up in good order, and made him lie down again. He said that he had been woke up when his leg got stabbed, and had grappled with a man; but the man had got out the window again.

Skelty had built his place on a side hill. The bar and dinin' hall was in front, and a small dance hall and kitchen back of it. Upstairs were bedrooms, and the ground sloped so, that the back rooms were only about five feet from the ground. This made the downstairs easier to heat in winter —and it was also convenient for any one who wanted to get in through a window.

Me and Spider ate breakfast next mornin'; but we would n't let Tank eat, rememberin' the Friar's rules for wounds. When we started away, Tank insisted on goin' along; so we had to ride slow. We went north, instead of in the direction we wanted to go, for fear some one might be spyin' on us. I was mighty sorry we had come, even though I had found out that Promotheus was under suspicion; and as soon as we had come to a pass where we could see a good distance in all directions, I sent Spider on a circle to tell the boys to bring things to a head as soon as possible.

Tank's leg ached him consid'able; and we had to ride purty slow; but by noon we had come to the Simpsons' cabin. We told 'em that Ty Jones was suspicious about the Greasers and intended to get square with all who had took a hand in removin' 'em; so they agreed to stand with us whenever we were ready to make a raid on Ty.

I made Tank lie down all afternoon, and drink all the water he could swallow, but that night when I started to

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ride over to the look-out, he insisted on goin' along. It was a hard ride, and I wanted him to wait until the next night, but he tagged along, so I had to ride slow. We had figured out that the feller who had tried to get him had seen the hat on his foot at the head o' the bed; and before he had had time to locate him proper, the noise the other one had made slammin' the window to my room had scared him, so he had taken his stab haphazard.

This must 'a' been the way, 'cause when drinkin', Tank was usually a regular long range snorer, and only a hurried man would have mistaken his feet for his head. Tank insisted that he had seen the feller's outline again' the window, and that it had been Dixon. I doubted this; but Tank insisted that the feller had had a neck like a beer bottle, and then I had to give in.

We did n't reach camp until sun-up, and then we found 'at Promotheus had been there the night before, with word that he had had a long talk with the woman, who had been in the most rational mood he had ever seen her in. He had drawn her into tellin' him all she could remember. She had told him about havin' her head full o' pictures; but not bein' able to tell the real ones from those she had dreamed. She said she had lost the key to them and could not understand 'em, that she remembered havin' sung on many different platforms, but could not tell where or when, and could not sing any more, though she sometimes tried. She said that whenever he said the name Carmichael, she saw the picture of a young man in white robes, but that he had died. When Promotheus had tried to make her understand that he was still alive, she had become frightened, and told him never to speak the name again.

He asked her about the Winter Garden in Berlin, and she

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said 'at this called up the picture of a man with curled-up mustaches, and then she had covered her eyes, and told him he must not mention this again, either. Horace was tellin' me all this; and when he finished, I sez: "Well, if this is the most rational she has ever got, she 'd be a nice one to handle in her usual condition. I don't see what we 're to do; but we have to move fast, as Ty Jones is suspicious."

The next night the Friar and I were down at the head of the path leadin' into the ravine when Promotheus came. He said that Dixon had come in with his face cut, and had told about seein' us over at Skelty's, and how we had bragged about gettin' him rail-roaded, and Dixon and the others had told him they were ready to back him up any time he wanted to go an' get even. He also said 'at Ty had been roastin' the whole gang of 'em for bein' afraid of Olaf, and advised us to warn Olaf to be on guard. He said the woman had told him that day that at all times she had a dull pain in the top part of her head. The was beginnin' to get worried, this was plain to see, and he did n't stay very long.

When we told the others what he had said, we decided it was our duty to go and tell Olaf that very night, so that he could send over the next day and get a couple o' the Simpson boys to come over and help watch his place at night, until we were ready to finish with Ty. We wanted to put it off as long as possible, as Ty would soon be in the fall round-up and there would n't be so many men at the home place.

Mexican Slim and Tillte Dutch started to ride to Olaf's; but I was restless that night, so I rode along with 'em. Just before we reached the Spread, we saw a bright light at the side o' the cabin. In a minute two other lights shot up, and we knew they were firin' brush at the side of it. We threw

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in the spurs and rode, keepin' close watch. Two men rode towards us, and we drew off to the side of the road. Just as they got opposite, we ordered 'em to halt; but they whirled and fired at us. We fired back, and started after 'em; but it was dark in the cottonwoods, and they gave us the slip and got away.

When we reached the cabin, we saw it was doomed. Piles o' brush had been heaped on all sides of it and fired one after the other. Everything was so dry that even the dirt on the roof would have burned, and there was nothing to do. Kit with the boy in her arms, and Olaf and Oscar beside her were standin' close by, watchin' it burn, and they felt mighty bitter. We told 'em why we had come, and advised 'em to go and leave Kit with the Simpsons, and come to our camp the next night. Then we rode back before daylight and told the others what had happened. We were all purty hosstile. Settin' fire to a cabin with a sleepin' woman inside was n't no fair way o' fightin'.

That afternoon as we were watchin' the ranch through the field glasses, we saw the woman and Promotheus walkin' together toward a little open space in the cottonwoods where the' was some grass close to the edge o' the crick. Thick bushes was all about this place, and it was cool and pleasant in the heat o' the day. They had n't been gone very long when we saw two others sneakin' after them. I looked through the glasses, and one appeared to be the skinny feller, Dixon, and the other, the Chinese cook. We saw 'em sneak into the bushes and disappear close to where the woman and Promotheus were sittin'. Part o' the time they talked together, and part of the time she read to him out of a book.

We fair ached to yell to 'em and put 'em on their guard;

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but all we could do was to sit up above in our look-out, feelin' weak and useless. I suppose we felt like a mother bird when she sees some inhuman human foolin' about her nest.

After a time the Chink crept out and scurried along to the old house. He bounced across the porch, all crouched over, and we knew he had some evil tale to cheer up his yellow soul with. In half a minute, Ty came out with him and follered him into the clump o' bushes. We could see the woman and Promotheus plain, with our naked eyes. It was a good thing, too; for Horace hung on to his glasses as though they were life preservers.

In about ten minutes, the bushes parted, and Ty stepped into the open space in front of 'em. Promotheus got to his feet slow, but the woman sat still, and did n't seem much interested.

Ty glared at Promotheus durin' the few minutes he was questionin' him, and then they all went back towards the ranch house. The woman went on to her own cabin, and Ty blew on the horn which hung at the side of the door, and that sneak of a Dixon came on the run, as though he had no idee what was wanted. Actin' under orders from Ty, he took The's gun and then tied his hands behind him and shut him up in an out buildin' near the stables. There did n't appear to be any one else about the ranch, and I suggested that we make a rush and take possession right then.

While we were debatin' it, we saw the punchers comin' in from the east, across the crick. There were about a dozen of 'em, strung out and ridin' hard the way they generally rode.

"They 're likely to string him up this very night," sez I; "and we 'll have to settle this business before sun-up."

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"They are not likely to be in any hurry," sez the Friar. "If we go to-night it will mean a lot o' bloodshed. To-morrow they will go out on the range again, and we stand a good chance of rescuing him without even a fight."

Olaf, of course, sided with the Friar, Horace sided with me, and we had a purty heated discussion. The Friar argued that he had the most at stake and had a right to select the plan with the least risk. I argued that Promotheus had the most at stake, and we had no right to take risk into account. We got purty excited, I usin' the word coward freely, while the Friar stuck to the word folly and kept cooler 'n I did. He finally won 'em over to a compromise. We were to go down close and keep watch durin' the night; but not to make a rush until we saw Promotheus actually in instant danger.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

OLAF RUNS THE BLOCKADE

TY JONES had been as wise as a fox when he located his ranch house. It sat on high ground, while back of it rose a cliff; so 'at the only way you could get to it without ropes from the back, was through the little ravine. The cliffs circled around to the crick on both sides, and the crick was so full o' rocks that the' was only two places a hoss could cross. He had strung barb wire through the cottonwoods in a regular tangle along the crick, and the only places he had to watch in case of an attack, were the ravine and these two fords. He could see for miles in all directions by goin' to the head o' the ravine; and you could hardly pick out a purtier place for a last-stand 'n the one he had selected.

The new cabin for the woman was right in front o' the mouth o' the ravine, the old cabin a hundred yards or so farther on, the cook-house and the Chink's quarters to the north o' this, the mess-hall for the men to the east of this, the barn, wagon-sheds, workshop, and so on, some distance to the south, and the bunk-shack a little to the north of the stables. He had several corrals back o' the barn and a pasture of about thirty acres shut in by a wire fence.

After I had cooled off a little, I saw that the Friar was right. The thing we could n't tell was, just how much they had forced Promotheus to confess. If they had simply got Ty jealous that he was tryin' to get the woman away, we might make it all the worse by chargin' down on 'em;

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while on the other hand he might have told where we were, and Ty might take it into his head to try to get us all. This last would have been the finest thing 'at could happen to us; but the' was no way to tell; so after eatin' supper, we went down to the edge o' the cliff to see what we could see.

We were most of us surprised to see how far the cabin stood from the cliff. In lookin' down from our look-out, we had failed to take the slope into account so it had looked as though we had been able to see the woman the minute she had come out o' the mouth of the ravine, while the fact was the cabin stood several hundred feet from the mouth. If it had n't been for the confounded dogs, we could have gone down and found out what we wanted to know. We made some remarks about those dogs which would have seared their hair off if they 'd 'a' been a little closer.

The light was kept in the mess-hall long after time to finish eatin'; and we guessed they were tryin' Promotheus, right while we were lookin' on from above. All of a sudden, Olaf struck his palm with his fist, and exclaimed: "What a fool I have been! Those dogs remembered Promotheus, and he never patted 'em. I have patted 'em and spoke soothin' words to 'em, and they would know me. I shall go down and listen."

Now this was a noble thought and we had n't a word to say again' it; so Olaf went back to camp, shed his boots and put on moccasins. Slim was a good shot with a rifle, so he staid with Horace, who had an elephant gun and a yearnin' to use it, up on the cliff above the mouth o' the ravine. They had seven rifles of one kind and another, and they thought they could make a disturbance if Olaf started anything. The rest of us went down the ravine to the last curve. We tried to get the Friar to stay behind; but his blood was up,

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and he would n't heed us. We had it made up to rope and tie him hand and foot, when we were finally ready to wind things up with Ty Jones.

Olaf left us with his big, hard face set into rigid lines. He had a long score to settle with Ty Jones, and he had made a funny gruntin' hum in his throat every few steps as we had walked down the ravine. We waited what seemed weeks; but the' was no uproar, and finally, he came out o' the gloom, and spoke to us in a whisper. We went back with him to the top o' the path before he told us what he had heard.

He said they were tryin' to make Promotheus confess who was back of him; but that Promotheus had steadily refused. He said 'at Ty had told him over and over that if he would tell him where he could lay hands on either the Friar or Dinky Bradford, he would give him a month to get out o' the country himself; but Promotheus had stood firm, and they had shut him up in the workshop again, tellin' him he would get nothin' but water until he did confess.

This made us some easier in our minds. Promotheus had acted so worn out and done up since his return, that he had fooled Ty; and Ty looked upon him as a broke-down man, and nothin' but a tool in the hands of some stronger men. Olaf said 'at Ty acted as though he thought the Friar had sent in a report to the government, and had got Bradford to come out here the time that Promotheus had disappeared; and in some way they had got word o' Horace comin' through Bosco this last time. Dixon had told about seein' us at Skelty's, and a strange feller told about bein' shot at, the night Olaf's cabin had been fired. They bunched all this together, and decided 'at the best thing to do was to

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trade Promotheus for Horace or the Friar, if it could be done. I had a chuckle all to myself, when I pictured Horace as he had been when I took him in hand, and now with the reputation he had n't quite earned, bein' a worry to the Ty Jones outfit.

"I allus said they were cowards," sez Horace, as soon as Olaf had finished his tale. "A man 's got an imagination, and as soon as he starts to live like a wolf, this imagination fills the world with watchdogs. Ty Jones never has fought in the open, and we 'll have no trouble with him as soon as we once get him on the run."

"Ty Jones has no fear," sez Olaf. "I know; I have seen with my own eyes. He is too clever to be trapped; but he has no fear."

"Well, wait and see," sez Horace.

Me and Tank kept watch on the cliff until mornin' and then as nothin' had happened, we went up to camp, and Slim and Dutch took watch at our regular look-out. As we sat down to breakfast, we noticed 'at the Friar was gone. Several spoke of him havin' been restless the night before and not turnin' in when the rest did. The Friar allus was unregular in his habits, especially at night; so we did n't pay much heed to him when he wrote by the fire, or went off by himself in the quiet starlight, to sing some o' the pressure off his heart; but at such a time as this, we anticipated him to be as circumspect as possible.

We started to hunt him up, but it did n't take long. Horace found a note pinned to the Friar's tarp, and the note told us that he had thought it all over careful durin' the night, and had decided that his duty compelled him to go down and offer himself in exchange for Promotheus. He said that when things came to such a tangle that no human

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ingenuity could unmix 'em, it was time to put trust in a higher power; that it was for him that Promotheus had risked his life, and that he felt he must take his place, as Ty had promised to let Promotheus go if he would betray him. He said that he could not see any way to help the woman, and that if he lost his life, for us not to think of revenge, as it would all turn out for the best in some mysterious way. The Friar had gone through a lot durin' the last few years, and it had finally undermined his patience. I knew just how he felt: he wanted something to happen which would end his suspense, and he did n't care much what it was.

As soon as Horace had finished readin', we all sat around in complete silence, gawkin' at each other. "Things has finally come to a head," sez Spider Kelley, solemnly.

"There now, that 's the Christian religion!" exclaimed Horace. "The Christian religion is founded on self-sacrifice and martyrdom, and all those who get it bad enough spend the bulk o' their time on the lookout to be martyrs and sacrifice theirselves for something — and they don't care much what for. Look at the crusades — the flower o' Europe was lured into the desert and dumped there like worn-out junk, even children were offered up in this sacrifice. Nothing but sentimentality, rank sentimentality. Now, when the ancient Greeks — "

"The thing for us, is to decide on what we 're to do next, not what the ancient Greeks did a few thousand years before we were born," sez I. "There is no use hidin' any longer. The strongest card we have up our sleeve is the fake reputation of Dinky Bradford, and what we must do is to make up the best plan to play it."

"Why do you say fake reputation?" demanded Horace.

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"Well, you 're not a government agent, are ya?" I asked.

"No," sez he; "but at the same time —"

"I did n't say 'at you was a fake, Horace," sez I in a soothin' voice. "I merely intimated that the things Ty Jones most fears about you are the things which were not so."

"I see what you mean," sez Horace, "and it 's all right. What 's your plan?"

"Well, as soon as we are sure 'at the Friar has reached Ty's," sez I, "we 'll send Ty word to deliver him back at once, and to appoint a meetin' place to explain things to us. Not make any threats nor bluffs nor nothin'. Just a plain, simple statement of what we want done, and sign your name to it."

"I think it would be better to tell him we had his place surrounded," said Horace.

"Nope," said I, "your old theory is best: let their imaginations supply the details. If we put the government into their minds too strong, they 're likely to find some way to deliver Promotheus over to the law. I have a sort of impediment that The was a little rough with an officer or two, after he deserted, and Ty knows all about him."

"How the deuce will we get word to Ty?" sez Horace. "As fast as we 'd send messengers, Ty would shut 'em up."

"One thing is certain, at least," sez I. "Ty won't string 'em up as long as he knows he 's bein' watched. And another thing is, that all of Ty's men are wanted for one thing or another, and the longer we keep 'em in suspense, the sooner they 'll weaken. We ought to send word to the Simpson boys. They are at least two to one again' us as we stand now."

Just at this junction, Slim arrived with the news that the

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Friar was ridin' up to the ford. I was purty sure 'at he would n't go down by the ravine. The Friar might lack judgment in certain matters; but you could count on him lookin' out for his friends, every time.

We hustled down to the look-out, and saw the Friar ride out into the open, and hail the house. In a minute the' was a crowd about him and they pulled him from his hoss and dragged him toward the mess-hall, actin' mighty jubilant. The dogs raised a consid'able fuss; but they did n't let any of 'em get to the Friar this time. I don't know whether they were tryin' to save the Friar or the dogs.

They took the Friar into the mess-hall, and kept him there a good long time; but I felt sure he would n't tell more 'n he wanted to. Then they brought him out and shut him up in the workshop with Promotheus.

"You don't see 'em turnin' Promotheus loose, do ya?" sez ol' Tank.

"Ty Jones would cheat himself playin' solitaire," sez Spider Kelley.

"He did n't agree to turn Promotheus loose if the Friar surrendered," sez Olaf. "He only said he would if Promotheus enticed the Friar into a trap."

Ty Jones certainly did have what ya call personal magnetism. His men stuck up for him, even when they was willin' to help snuff him out.

We sent Oscar over to get the Simpson boys; and then we made our plans. The' was no way to get to our camp from above, and we could easy guard the two trails 'at led up from below. Nothin' would have suited us better 'n to have Ty decide to come and get us; so we told Oscar to make all the fuss he wanted when he came back.

Nothin' happened down at the ranch that day. The

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woman drifted about, the same as usual, not seemin' to observe 'at the' was anything different from ordinary, and the punchers all stayed in sight. A few of 'em rode up to high spots across the crick and took gappin's, and a couple of 'em came up the ravine and examined the ground on top; but they did n't seem to find anything to interest 'em.

That night Horace wrote an order on Ty Jones to release the Friar — we had decided not to mention Promotheus — and Olaf started down with the message. We posted ourselves the same as we had done before; and after about an hour, Olaf returned.

He said he had examined the workshop, which was of logs, the same as the rest o' the buildin's, and had heard the Friar and Promotheus talkin'; but had n't ventured to say anything for fear they were watched. He said 'at the Friar was holdin' out on the value o' fastin'; while Promotheus was speakin' in defence of ham an' eggs. Then he said he had crept up to the front door of the old cabin, and had fastened up the order with a dagger.

Olaf looked to me as though he had been enjoyin' himself a little more 'n his tale gave reason for; so I pressed him, and finally he admitted that there had been a man on watch at the mouth o' the ravine. He said he had wriggled through it on his belly, thinkin' it too good a place to be overlooked since the Friar had put 'em on their guard; and after lyin' still a moment, he had heard the man move. He said he had snaked up to him, and had got him by the throat. He said he thought it was Dixon because the' was so much throat to get hold of. Dixon had been perfectly resigned to havin' Olaf lynched that time and Olaf's memory was not o' the leaky kind.

"What became of him, Olaf?" I asked.

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"Oh, he fought some," said Olaf.

"Did he get away?" I asked.

"Un, yes — yes he got away," sez Olaf.

"Where did he go to?" sez I.

"I think he went down — way down," sez Olaf.

"Down where?" sez I. "Why don't you tell us what happened to him?"

Olaf looked down at his right hand. It did n't resemble a hand much; but it would 'a' been a handy tool to use in maulin' wedges into a log. "Why," sez he, "he wriggled about, and started to squeak; and when I squeezed in on his neck to shut off the squeak, why his neck broke. It was too thin to be stout."

I held out my hand. "Olaf," I sez, "I want to shake the hand that shook his neck."

"Yes," sez Tank, "and by dad, so do I!" Tank's leg was still tender.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

SKIRMISHES

OSCAR arrived durin' the night with the whole four Simpson boys; and word that Kit and the kid were in fine shape, with ol' man Simpson keepin' a sharp watch, and Kit ready to take a standpat hand any time trouble crowded too close. We expected to keep Ty busy, and so did n't worry any about Kit. Before dawn we started the four Simpsons out to make a circle and cross the crick, tellin' 'em to use their own judgment to some extent; but not to run any risk. We wanted 'em to act like scouts and, if possible, to draw Ty into chasin' 'em, and then to lead him back to our camp. We could see all of the other side o' the crick from our look-out.

By dawn the rest of us were down on the edge of the cliff, and we saw 'em find Dixon's body. They were consid'able excited about it; so we judged they had also read the notice on the door.

"What shall we do, to-day?" asked Horace.

"Shoot dogs," sez I. "There ain't any call to play safe any longer, and those dogs are the worst bother we have."

"All right," sez Horace. "This will be a good chance for me to see if I 'm still in practice. I 'm a purty good rifle-shot, Happy."

I never could quite harden myself to Horace. The change in him was almost as much as that between an egg and a chicken; but yet the' was still a suggestion of what he had

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been at first — his side-burns, most likely — and it allus jarred me to see him steamin' ahead with self-confidence fizzin' out of his safety valve. He took his elephant gun and trained it on one o' the dogs which was sniffin' around the place where Dixon's body had lain. We were purty well off to the north of the ravine; but it was still a consid'able angle of a down-shot, and a good long one too.

"Remember," sez I, "that when shootin' down grade, you are mighty apt to shoot too high."

He lowered his gun an' looked at me as though I had called him a girl baby. "I have shot from every angle the' is," sez he; "and I 've shot big game, too."

"Ex-cuse *me!*" sez I. "Shoot now, and let 's see what happens."

You had to take off your hat to Horace when it came to a cultivated taste in firearms. The thing he had got Promotheus with had been small enough to conceal in your back hair, while his present instrument was n't rightly a rifle at all, it was a half-grown cannon. It shot a bullet as big as your thumb which mushroomed out and exploded, as soon as it hit. The dog died a merciful death; but he left a mighty disquietin' bunch o' remains.

"Good boy, Horace!" I said, slappin' him on the shoulder. "You keep on removin' the dogs, and I 'll go up the slope, and pertect your rear, should they try to come up the ravine."

I heartily endorsed this slaughter o' the dogs; but I was n't ambitious to see it done. I have been well acquainted with a large number o' dogs of all sorts and sizes, and I have deep feelin's for dogs. When it comes to livin' accordin' to a feller's own standard, a dog has us all beat. When a dog signs up, he don't whisper nothin' under his

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breath. He signs up for the full trip, and he don't ask a lot o' questions about how long the hours 'll be, or what sort o' grub and quarters and pay he 'll draw. He just wags his tail, and sez: "This here feller is my idea of exactly what a feller ought to be; and I 'm for him in all he does. If he wants me to fight, I 'm hungry for it, if he wants me to be polite and swaller a lot o' insults, I 'll do it, or if the time comes when my death is worth more to him 'n my life, why, I don't know nothin' about future rewards or such truck; but I 'm perfectly willin' to swap life for death in his name, and I 'm proud to take the consequences — so long as he gets the reward."

I own up 'at a dog has no morality; he 's only a reflection of his master. A decent man has a decent dog, a vicious man has a vicious dog — and this is why it would have hurt me more to watch Horace testin' his aim on the dogs 'n it would if he had been minded to pot a few Cross-branders themselves, especially Ty Jones.

Now, the sound o' this gun, and the sight of the dead dog made things buzz down below. The men peered out from all directions, but hardly knew what to do. I had sent Mexican Slim off to the right, just above the ravine, to pick off any dogs 'at came in that direction, and soon after Horace got his, Slim also got one; and Ty whistled the dogs to come to the house. Here was where his method of treatin' a dog showed up bad. Any time before this, a dog which so much as set foot on the porch had been belted with anything capable of inflictin' pain, and now they refused to go inside.

The Chink was able to whistle 'em to the cook-house; but that was as far as they 'd go; and while they were standin' in a bunch, Horace and Slim each got one. Ty was standin' near one o' the poles which upheld the back porch, and

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Horace exploded a slab from this pole in such a way that it knocked Ty down. This put the whole bunch into a consternation. Horace certainly could shoot some. It made me think o' the poorhouse, when I reflected on what it had cost him to learn how.

Nothin' much happened that day. Horace and Slim stuck to their knittin', and the Simpson boys played their part well. They rode in a bunch, and when they 'd come in sight o' the ranch house, one would hold the field-glass case to his eyes, as though lookin' through the field glasses, and another would turn and wave his hands, as though signallin' to some one up in the hills. Once, two punchers went to the corral and saddled hosses; but Horace shot one o' the hosses, and both men flew for the stable without waitin' to take off the saddles. They had never seen such wounds as Horace's elephant gun created, and it put 'em in a mighty thoughtful mood.

The Simpson boys came in soon after dark; and we all held a council of war while eatin' supper. I was purty certain that we had a better bunch o' men than those we were fightin'. It is no test of nerve to kill a man: a lot o' men who got the reputation o' bein' bad were nothin' but accidents or sneaks; but when you have to stick through a slow fight without knowin' the odds again' ya, it gives your nerve a mighty searchin' try-out. I had hopes that after a day or so, they 'd be certain that the hills on all sides of 'em were full of enemies, and they 'd be mighty glad to settle on our terms. I did n't want to kill a single man more 'n was necessary. Horace also thought we could wear out their nerve; but Olaf shook his head.

"Some o' the punchers may desert in the night," sez he; "but as long as a single one remains to stand back to back

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with Ty Jones, Ty Jones 'll stay and fight. He has no fear — I have seen."

"The question is this," sez I, "if those fellers are the kind to get fiercer the longer they 're kept in suspense, the thing to do is to raid 'em to-night; but, on the other hand, if they 're the kind whose nerve evaporates when it is kept uncovered, the thing to do is to wear 'em down. Let 's vote on it."

We decided to do some more wearin'; so we kept a guard at the camp, and the rest of us went down to the cliff, and tossed over stones to where we thought they 'd be hid, provi-din' they had put guards at the mouth of the ravine. We raised a yelp the first throw, and heard a rush o' men from the new cabin, though the shadow was so dense down below we could n't see a thing. This showed us that some o' the dogs still survived and were bein' used as guards, and also that there were men quartered in the woman's cabin. This was a bother, as it would force us to be careful until we found out where she was livin'.

We posted a guard at the top of the path leadin' up from the ravine, another at our camp, and went to sleep, feelin' purty tol'able well fixed. Nothin' happened that night, and the next day, we made ready to do about the same as we had done the day before; but when we reached the cliff, the' was n't a sign o' life below — not a single, breathin' thing in sight, not even a hoss in the pasture.

"They 've got away!" exclaimed Horace.

"Where to?" sez Olaf. "Ty Jones has n't any more use for the law 'n we have, and you 'll never make me believe 'at he 's pulled out and left all his belongin's for whoever wants 'em."

"That 's so," sez I; "but where the deuce are they?"

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We watched all mornin'; but not a sign, not a bit o' smoke from the cook-house, just the ranch buildin's settin' there as deserted as the Garden of Eden. The Simpsons were workin' their stunts across the crick; so about ten in the mornin', Slim and Dutch rode over to tell 'em to come in, as they would look mighty foolish, providin' they were makin' signals to one of the hills where the Cross-branders themselves were hid.

After eatin' dinner, the rest of us went down to the lookout, Horace shoulderin' his elephant exterminator, and lookin' peevish and fretful, 'cause the' was nothin' to shoot at. "Boys," sez I, "do ya suppose 'at poor old Promotheus has been goin' all this time on nothin' but water."

"He 's gone longer 'n this on nothing but water," sez Horace; "and so have I. Over in Africa, once, we sent a tribe o' blacks around to beat some lions out for us; but they fell in with another tribe who were not friendly, and they just kept on goin'. Promotheus and I were lost from everything, and we got into a desert before we found a way out. We went for I don't know how long without water. Anyway, we went long enough to get into that numb condition when the earth becomes molten copper, and the sky a sun glass, and a man himself feels like another man's nightmare. That tender old Promotheus you 're sympathizin' with, carried me the best part of a day, or a century — time had melted entirely away — and when we came back to our senses we lay beside a pool of water. He 's tough, Promotheus is."

"At the same time," sez Tank, "settin' cooped up in a log hut with nothin' to cheer ya but water, is n't my idy of havin' high jinks."

"Perhaps, too," sez Spider Kelley, who did n't have enough

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sense of fitness to change a nickel, "those mongrel coyotes lynched both him an' the Friar before they vamosed."

"They would n't do that," sez Olaf; "but I wish we knew what they had done."

"Let 's go and shoot at the old cabin or the bunk-shack," sez Oscar.

"I move we wait, and raid 'em to-night," sez I, and this was what we decided to do.

The rest of us lolled about purty patient — as active men, an' beasts too, are likely to do when the's nothin' on hand — but Horace who had lived in a room most of his life, had n't quite learned to turn off his steam when he had n't any use for it; so he kept bobbin' up and fussin' about. All of a sudden, he gave a sort of gasp, and pointed up the slope.

We looked and saw one man crouched over and runnin' along where the south trail to our camp swung around a crag; and we sprang to our feet, and looked up at the camp. As we looked, the face of Ty Jones with a grin on it, poked up over a stone and leered down at us most exasperatin'.

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CHAPTER FORTY

AN IRRITATING GRIN

Now, you can mighty easy understand that this was a fair sized, able-bodied, bite-and-kick consternation for us, if ever the' was one in the world. Our look-out was behind a ridge which sheltered it complete from below, but left it as open from above as the straw hat which Stutterin' Sam made the dude crawl through. Up above us, lookin' down from the rocks in front of our camp was Ty Jones, grinnin' as self-composed an' satisfied as a cat which has just removed all evidence of there ever havin' been any Canary birds; and truth to tell, we felt as indiscriminate and embarrassed as a naked man at a dance party.

All we saw was just Ty and his grin. We knew the' was one other man with him, but that was all we did know; while our strength was as plain to them, as Tillte Dutch was the time he fell in love and used iodaform on his hair instead o' perfume. We just stood and looked up at Ty, and then we turned our heads and looked at each other, and I never saw as many stupid expressions in one mess. We felt as though every minute was liable to be our next.

Whenever ol' Tank Williams was surprised or puzzled or wrastlin' with his own thoughts, he allus put me in mind of a picture I once saw of a walrus. The walrus was loungin' up on a rock, and he looked as solemn and philosophical as though some young snip of a school boy had tested his intellect by askin' him what two times one made.

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I never saw Tank look so much like the walrus as he did this time 'at Ty Jones surprised us. O' course Tank's teeth was different, but his mustaches stuck down in much the same way, and when I looked at him, I busted out laughin', though I own up I was scared enough to stampede the moment before. When I laughed, it seemed to break the charm, and before I buttoned up my lips again, Horace had pulled up his elephant gun, and taken a blast at Ty's grin. Ty pulled down his face behind the stone as soon as Horace aimed at him; but the range was long enough to strain even such a devil-tool as this half-grown cannon, so nothin' came of it.

After my chuckle, I began to think in streams. The ground to the right of us — as we looked up towards Ty — was broken, and it occurred to me that he had been holdin' us with his grin so as to give some of his men time to sneak down and cut us off, he and the balance were above us, the ravine to our left, and straight back of us the cliff. We could n't stick where we were again' odds, and there was n't any water in the clump of rocks which faced the path where it come out of the ravine. As I ran over these details in my mind, I had as little temptation to laugh as I ever did have; but the second I thought of the clump o' rocks facin' the path, I saw that the path itself was the answer.

There was no reason to hurry, as far as I could see; they could not come to us without exposin' themselves, and every moment we waited, the closer would come Dutch, Slim, and the four Simpson boys. To the right of us, as I said, the ground was broken, and here was where they would be most likely to sneak down on us. By goin' in a diagonal direction, we could get to where we could see straight up the

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washes which made up this broken ground, and so know what we had to fight.

"Come on, fellers," sez I, climbin' up over the ridge.

"Where ya goin'?" sez Horace.

I sat down on top o' the ridge. "Have you got any plan?" sez I calmly.

"No," sez he, "I have n't; but I 'd like to know —"

"If you 're willin' to take charge," sez I, "why, go ahead, and I 'll obey orders; but I don't care how small the body is, it can't do quick work with more 'n one head, as you ought to know better 'n any of us — it havin' been tried frequent in those Greek tales you 're all the time inflictin' us with."

Horace put his back up a little. "I 'm willin' to agree to anything reasonable," sez he; "but I don't see any sense in leavin' this spot until we know where we 're goin'."

I folded my fingers together, set my thumbs to chasin' each other, and began to whistle. I was n't jealous of Horace; but it just occurred to me that I had handled men before he 'd mustered up courage enough to stay out after seven o'clock P. M. without gettin' his mother's permission, and I wanted to test the others and see if they thought he had picked up more craft in three years 'n I had in a lifetime; so I whistled the tune to his song, and looked up at the clouds.

"What 's your idee, Happy?" sez ol' Tank. I had nourished Tank on thought-food for a good long session, and I knew he 'd feel mighty much like a lost calf if I left him to rustle up his own idees; so I just gave my hands a little toss and kept on with my whistlin'.

"Aw, don't be so blame touchy," sez Spider Kelley. I had pulled Spider through a number o' tight places, also,

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and I knew he 'd soon begin to feel trapped up and smothery, if I left him to sweat out his own idees for a few minutes longer; so I gave him the same gesture I had bestowed on Tank.

"What do you think we 'd better do, Olaf?" sez Horace.

Olaf looked all around but did not see anything. "They have come up the ravine, took the path up the other side, through the clump o' trees, made a wide circle and got to our camp," sez Olaf. "If we try to get away, they cut us off. If we stay here, we die for want of water. If we rush up the hill, they shoot us from behind the rocks. All I can see is to wait until night, and then make a rush for it."

"Well, that don't look like much of an idee to me," sez Horace. I kept on whistlin'.

"I move we foller Happy," sez Spider Kelley.

"I second the motion," sez Tank.

"I 'm willin' to," sez Olaf, and Oscar nodded his head. This was about all Oscar ever used his head for except to hang his hat on; but he was a good boy and sizey.

"All right," sez Horace. "Now then, Happy Hawkins, the responsibility is on you."

"Now, be sure you mean this," sez I; "for my plan is a foolish one, and I don't care to explain each step. I don't claim 'at my scheme is the best; but my experience has been, that a poor plan carried out beats a good plan which never came in. Climb up here, and we 'll walk off in that direction without lookin' behind us."

They could n't see any sense in this; but they follered me without chatterin', and I was satisfied. Horace had the field glasses in his pocket; so when we had reached the place I thought would do, I set him to lookin' across the crick careful to see if he could see anything. All the others

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watched him, and I got behind and looked up the slope. I saw several men hidin' in the washes, and I said in a low tone: "Keep on lookin' across the hill, Horace. Now, you others get out from behind him. Now, Horace, whirl and examine the washes up the slope and see how many men you can count."

Horace whirled, as did all the rest of 'em, and we found seven fellers in sight. We figured 'at there must be at least fifteen Cross-branders in the neighborhood, and probably more, and the ones we were able to see in the washes convinced me 'at Ty had staked everything on gettin' us cornered. They did n't have enough to split up, so I felt sure they would leave the ravine open, not thinkin' it likely we 'd try to go down there.

"Now," sez I, "let 's go to that clump o' rocks and hide." They all came along; but did n't seem enthusiastic, because the washes led down close to the rocks — we, ourselves, havin' sneaked down 'em while we were waitin' for the woman that day. We could n't see the path the boys would take in comin' up to our camp from across the crick, while the Cross-branders could see 'em a good part o' the way, and this fretted me a lot; though I hoped they had heard Horace's elephant gun.

After a time, Horace, through the glasses, saw a feller's head watchin' us from our old look-out; so we knew they had crept up along the back o' that ridge. Then we heard consid'able shootin' off to the right, and knew the boys had got back. There were several good places for ambush, and we felt purty blue at what had most likely happened; but they were on hossback, and would be on their guard after knowin' 'at the Cross-branders were up to some trick; so we hoped for the best.

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This clump o' rocks we were in was composed of one big crag and a lot o' little ones. The big one shut off our view, and finally Horace said it would be a good plan to get on top of it, as the chances were we could get a good view in all directions. It was fifteen feet up to where the' was footin', and we did n't see how it could be done; but he said it was simple; so we let him try it. He made Olaf and Tank face the rock, holdin' on to each other. Then I climbed to their shoulders and they passed up Horace. I handed him up as far as I could reach, and it was as simple as peelin' a banana. The signal was for him to drop a pebble when he wanted to come down.

In about two moments a stone the size o' your fist fell on Oscar's head; which was a good thing, for it might otherwise have hurt a head we had more use for. We laddered ourselves again' the rock, and Horace came down without missin' a single one of our ears. When he reached the level, he put his finger on his lips, and said he had seen ten men sneakin' up toward the rock and only a few hundred feet away. Oscar was still holdin' to the lump on his head, so Horace explained 'at the' had n't been any pebbles on top the crag.

"Now, what ya goin' to do?" asked Horace to me.

"You, Olaf, and Oscar go around the rock to the left," sez I; "and Tank, Spider, and I 'll go around to the right. Each fire only once, and then run around the rock again and make for the path leadin' down into the ravine. Keep close together all the way."

"The ravine!" exclaimed Spider.

"Sure," sez I.

"All right," sez Spider, draggin' out the "all" until it would do for "I told ya so," in case we got pocketed.

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It worked fine; we flew around, surprised 'em, shot a volley into 'em, made 'em seek cover, and then we flew for the head o' the path. Ol' Tank, with his damaged prop, was as nimble as a one-legged Norman hoss, and Horace was loaded down with elephant ammunition; so that it was wise to have all the time we could get. Ty and five others jumped up from our look-out, and tried to head us off; but they had to go twice as far as we did. Ty and two others had rifles, and they stopped and took shots at us, but nothin' came of it.

"Hurry on to the ranch buildin's," I called as we went down the path. Then I turned back, to see what they were doin'.

"Let me take a shot at 'em," sez Horace's voice at my elbow.

"Why didn't you go on with the rest?" sez I. "I can give you half way and beat you runnin'."

"Let me take just one shot," sez Horace, so I gave in and let him. Two fellers were runnin' at a long angle toward the mouth o' the ravine to head us off, and get a shot from above; so I told him to try for one o' them. He fiddled with his hind sight as calm as though shootin' for a Christmas turkey, and hanged if he didn't topple one over. The other stopped, and then ran back with his head ducked low to the ground, while the wounded one crawled behind a rock.

"Now dust for the buildin's," sez I; "and don't try any more nonsense. Let me carry the weapon, and you won't be so overloaded. I'll start after you in a jiffy."

When I looked back, I saw that all of 'em had slowed down consid'able, out o' respect to the elephant gun; but I could still count seventeen, so we hadn't seen 'em all

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before. When they started towards the head of the path again, I took a shot at Ty Jones; but I did n't savvy the rear sight, and all it did was to make 'em slow down once more. Then I slid down the path and hot-footed it down the ravine. I saw signs o' hosses, so I knew they had rode most of their trip, and would be in a position to circle around all they wanted to.

I soon caught up with the others, and Tank was puffin' purty freely. All the rest were runnin' easy, and we came out o' the mouth o' the ravine without seein' a single soul. Now, we hardly knew what to do. It was about the same distance from the mouth o' the ravine to the first curve in it, as it was to the woman's cabin; so I told Spider to stay at the corner o' the cabin, and watch that curve.

Then we went around and found the door locked. We called twice to the woman, but the' was no reply; so Olaf picked up a big stone and knocked off the lock. We made a quick examination; but the' was no one there. I posted Horace and Spider in this cabin to watch the mouth o' the ravine through the window facin' it, and to shoot into 'em, should they foller us close.

We next went to the big house, where we had more trouble as everything was fastened with bars on the inside, except the front door which had an immense padlock on the outside. We finally broke it off, and out dashed three o' their confounded dogs. We killed 'em, and went inside; but the' was no one else there. Next we went to the workshop, and after breakin' off the padlock, we found the Friar and Promotheus gagged and tied. The Friar was sad, and Promotheus was mad. We sent 'em up to the cook-shack to get on speakin' terms with food again, and rummaged the rest o' the buildin's; but could find neither the woman nor

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the Chink, and by the time we were through, it was gettin' along towards dark.

I set Tank to cookin' a meal while the rest of us carried logs and piled 'em in the mouth o' the ravine. It would be moonlight up to ten o'clock, and after that I intended to have a fire to see by. We also set up some logs at each o' the two fords. After supper we divided into two equal groups o' four each, to stand guard, each man to watch two hours, one at the window of the new cabin, the other from the porch of the old one, where a view across both fords could be had.

The Friar was purty downcast at our not bein' able to find the woman, and at our still bein' in a state o' war; but he did n't kick none. He promised not to go over and surrender himself any more, and said he would stand guard careful, and warn us the first thing 'at happened. We decided 'at they would probably attack us that night, and we finally chose the old shack, as it had water piped into it from a spring a hundred yards above. I figured 'at they 'd be most apt to come down the ravine, so I picked out the Friar, Olaf, and Tank to help me watch it, and the others to take turns watchin' the fords.

About half past nine, we lit the fires and turned in, with Oscar on the porch, and Olaf at the window of the new cabin. I thought they would n't come before two o'clock, and had it arranged so 'at the last ford watches would be held by Spider and Promotheus.

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

THE NIGHT-ATTACK

I WAS N'T sleepy, and lyin' stretched out is the worst cure for sleeplessness 'at ever I tried; so after twistin' about for a while, I got up and took a look around. Oscar had n't seen a thing, which I took to be a mighty encouragin' sign. Mostly, when you set a boy on guard he rouses ya out to meet the enemy every fifteen minutes, and then goes to sleep just before the enemy actually does arrive; but Olaf had trained Oscar to do what he was told, as he was told — when he was told — and then not to talk about it for a couple o' years afterward. Oscar was reliable to a degree; but for conversational purposes, I 'd sooner have been shipwrecked with a brindle bull pup.

I did n't have any doubts of Olaf; but I dropped in to see what sort of a view he had, now that it had got dark. The fire was burnin' high, and the ravine was as bright as day. Enough o' the fire would last until mornin' to give a good view, so I strolled down around the bunk-shack and stables. I saw a form movin' in the shadow o' the cotton-woods, and stalked it careful, finally gettin' close enough to make out the Friar.

"Can't ya sleep, Friar?" sez I.

"No, no, I can't sleep," sez he with a sigh. "Where do you think she is, Happy?"

"They probably took her with 'em; and left the Chink

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to guard her, back in the hills," sez I. "No matter what happens, they 're not liable to harm her."

"It 's sore hard to be patient," sez the Friar. "I am honestly opposed to all violence and bloodshed. I have allus believed that all wars were useless and unnecessary; but it 's sometimes hard for me to love my enemies."

"You 're just worried and can't see clear," sez I soothin'ly. "It 's plain enough if you just think it out — that 's the best part o' religion. One place it sez: 'Love your enemies.' In another it sez: 'Foller the Lord's example.' In still another it sez: 'Whom he loves, he chasteneth' — which you said meant to punish. Now then, you have it all worked out: the proper way to love your enemy is to punish him; and, accordin' to this rule, we 're goin' to love the hide off o' one o' your enemies, if so be we 're able to do it."

But the Friar never would stand for havin' his religion doctored to suit the taste, he had to take it as stiff and raw as alcohol, where he was concerned, himself; so he turned in and explained things to me until from my standpoint, misery was the only religious excuse a feller had for bein' happy.

By this, it was time to change watches, so the Friar relieved Olaf, while Horace and his elephant-pest went out on the front porch to watch the fords, and I turned in. None of us took our boots off that night; we had a little fire in the big room, and slept on the floor, holdin' our belts in our hands. I drowsed off quick enough this time, knowin' 'at Tank and Promotheus would be next on watch and certain not to let anything surprise them.

Sure enough, just about the time we had slept ourselves into complete forgetfulness, we were all jerked to our feet by the first shot Tank fired, and this one shot was followed

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by a bunch of others. The Cross-branders had crept down the ravine, and a little after three when the fire had burned low, they had tried to get by unnoticed. Ol' Tank only had one eye, but it was a workin' eye, if ever the' was one, and he shot two of 'em with one o' their own rifles, and when they rushed him in a body, spreadin' out wide, he retreated to the old cabin, accordin' to directions.

The old cabin had loopholes in it, and we had found three fairly good rifles, but not much ammunition. We did n't waste any shots while it was still dark; but they fired at us now and again. They had brought the five rifles we had left at our camp, and used 'em freely. Slim had taken the other rifle with him.

All durin' that day they broke the monotony by takin' frequent shots at us; but the logs in the cabin had been matched up for just such a purpose, and not one of us was even scratched with a splinter. What we were most afraid of was, 'at they would find some way to set fire to the cabin, and we counted on that bein' one o' the night's diversities.

There were three good sized rooms in the old cabin which was only one story high. One big room occupied the full south half o' the cabin, a bedroom was in the northeast corner, and a library in the northwest corner. Yes, sir, a regular library, and the Friar and Horace both said it was a choice collection o' books. Horace showed us one book which had a photograph of the original Promotheus chained to a rock with the vultures peckin' at his liver, and he certainly must have been some man to stand it. This picture made The's eyes light up consid'able.

The' was also some chromos of naked stone images on the wall, which the Friar and Horace called mighty fine copies. They were purty well dumb-founded to find 'at Ty

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Jones did n't live as much like a bob-cat as they 'd thought. Under the book shelves was a row o' locked drawers. They stuck out farther than the shelves above 'em, and we wanted to pry 'em open to see what was inside; but the Friar would n't let us.

That was a wearin' day, and we were all glad when it finally dragged itself to the lake o' darkness, and dove in. We had our minds made up for a busy night, but waitin' for trouble is more crampin' to the soul than bein' in the midst of it, so we felt cheerfuller as soon as night actually settled down.

We did n't dare have a fire in the fireplace, for fear it would show 'em our loopholes, and we did n't care to advertise these any more 'n was necessary; but we set a lighted candle far back in the fireplace, to see to load by. The fireplace was across the southwest corner o' the big room. There were no loopholes in the library, but we feared the light might leak through a chink in the window shutter, so we did n't have any light there. We kept one man watchin' through loopholes in the bedroom, and two watchin' in the big room, and were able to cover the whole neighborhood.

The cook-shack was the nearest buildin', and only the two loopholes in the north end o' the bedroom covered that; so we decided to fling the library window open and fire through that, in case they made a rush from that direction. We knew they would n't be likely to start anything until after eleven, as the moon would n't set until then, so we stretched out on the floor, leavin' Oscar, Horace, and Spider on watch.

When a feller has been keepin' his attention wound up for several days, his mainspring finally gets strained, and the cogs in his head get to cuttin' up regardless. I managed to

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get a purty fair dab o' sleep; but it seemed as though I dove straight out o' wakefulness into a dream, and it was some the rottenest dream I ever had. I dreamed that Ty Jones had come and stooped over me and asked me what I thought o' the way he had conducted his life. In a dream a feller is apt to do the foolest things imaginable, so I looked up into Ty's face and told him my true opinion. I sez to him: "Ty, if your brains were blastin' powder, they would n't make enough explosion to raise your hat."

Ty did n't take kindly to this opinion; so he jumped into the air and lightin' on my face, began to trample it with his heels. The discomfort of this wakened me; but at first I did n't know I was awake. Several men had been actually tramplin' on me, and the' was a general fight takin' place in that room which was hard to make head or tail of.

In the flickerin' candle rays, it was mighty bothersome to tell who from which; so the' was no shootin'. Aside from Ty and Pepper Kendal, we averaged bigger 'n they did, except Horace and Spider. Spider had length but he ran small in the arms and legs, while Horace was twenty-two caliber any way you looked at him. They abused Horace some consid'able, and he got kicked and trampled on purty liberal; but he was of terrier blood, and the second or third time he got kicked into a corner, he crawled out on his hands an' knees, picked out a pair o' legs which was strange to him, wrapped his arms about 'em, and fetched their owner to the floor with a thump. I spared enough time to knock the feller on the head; and then Horace played his trick over again.

Olaf was a mad bull in a mix-up like this — Horace said he had beershirker blood in him, and this must be good stuff for it made Olaf grin when Horace accused him of it. O'

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course the' ain't much head or tail to such a fight, and in lookin' back on it, it 's just like spurtin' the pages of a picture-book with your thumb and tryin' to observe the pictures. I saw the Friar leanin' again' the mantel-piece with a hurt look on his face; and it disgusted me.

In times o' peace, I respected his prejudice again' violence; but this was no time for foolishness, and I recall mutterin' to myself a wish that Horace might have the loan of his big body for the next half hour. I saw Olaf knock down two men with one blow, I saw The save ol' Tank's life, just as a half-breed was about to knife him from behind; but for the most part it was just about as orderly a mess as a popper-ful o' corn over a bed o' coals.

The fight did n't last more 'n five or ten minutes. They had banked on surprisin' us; and when this failed they were ready to back out. I afterward found out that it was the Friar who had caught sight of 'em first, he not bein' able to sleep.

Ty and Pepper Kendal were the last to leave the big room; and when their own men were out of it, they opened fire on us; we fired back, and when they backed into the library where the rest o' their gang had disappeared, we made a rush for 'em. I supposed they had come in through the library window, and I called for a candle, hopin' to grab Ty before he could get out.

Spider Kelley had already picked up the candle, and he had it in the doorway in a second. The big drawers at the bottom o' the bookcase were swung back, showin' a stairway behind 'em, and Ty Jones stood at the top with Pepper Kendal just behind him. I dove through the air, catchin' Ty's wrist with my left hand and his throat with my right, Pepper Kendal bent his gun on me, Olaf grabbed the gun

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which was fired just as The grabbed Pepper's arms. It looked to me as though the bullet must have gone into Olaf's head; but just then we tripped, rolled down the stairs and the imitation drawers swung to behind us.

All holts were broke on the way down, and when I reached the bottom, I lay as quiet as a frozen moonbeam. I heard steps runnin' away from me in the dark, and presently the legs of the man next to me moved, and he got up. I rose to a crouchin' position, held my arm above my head, and whispered, "Who is this?"

For answer, I got a smash on the arm with the butt of a forty-five which drove it down again' my head hard enough to bring me to my knees and wake up my horse-sense. I might 'a' known they 'd have a signal.

I waited with my back again' the wall until the silence began to soak into my nerve. One o' my guns had got lost durin' the mess upstairs; but I still had the other, and when I closed my grip around it, it seemed like I was shakin' hands with my best friend. As far as I could discover I had n't been shot; but several knife-cuts and bruises began to hum little tunes which was n't in nowise cheerin'. I just simply don't like to be kept waitin' in the dark!

After a bit I reached my hand out cautious, and felt the heel of a ridin' boot. I examined as careful as though the feller inside the boot was a disguised bear-trap; but the' was no need. His neck was broke. I felt of his face, and it was soft and smooth. The face of the young feller with the boy's eyes, I had seen put to bed drunk that night at Skelty's, flashed across me, and I gave a sigh; but I had too much on my mind to turn soft, so I began to feel around again.

Presently my fingers struck the heel of another boot. I

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shut down on my bellows until the breath did n't get down past the top inch o' my neck, and I was as gentle with the heel o' that boot, as though it was a bitin' man's eyeball; because I sure felt a quiver in it. I slid my fingers up that boot a quarter inch at a time, and I did n't use no more rudeness 'n a mouse would use in tryin' to sneak a cheese piller out from under a sleepin' cat. When my fingers finally struck corduroy, I purt nigh gave a shout, for this was what Promotheus wore.

It allus embarrasses a man to be felt over in the dark, so I took my time with The; but after locatin' both hands and his crooked mouth, I discovered he 'd been knocked out complete. I rubbed his wrists until he began to moan, and then I pinched his nose until he was able to notice my name when I whispered. He had bumped his head in fallin', and it made him sick to the stomach; so while he was gettin' tuned up again, I prospected around.

I crawled up the stairs but could n't hear a sound, I scratched with my fingers, knocked softly, and pushed until my eyes began to hurt; so I knew 'at the only way out for us was to follow the Cross-branders. Things had happened so sudden up above that I had n't an idy as to how many were fightin' us; but I was still purty certain that a fair sized bunch had run out the tunnel just as I dove into it, and I did n't choose to bump into 'em in the dark.

When I came down the stairs, The felt able again; so we started to prospect. We agreed that strikin' our teeth together would be our signal, and then we made our examination. The right side o' the tunnel was smooth, the way Nature works, the left side was rough, and indicated man's doin's. Aside from us two, the only other one in the tunnel

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was the boy with the broken neck; but the tunnel opened into a big cave, and we did n't know what to do about it.

Finally we started around the right hand wall, me crawlin' first, and The's fingers touchin' my boot at every move. After goin' some distance, a great, straggly gray form rose up from the floor o' the cave, and gave me a shock which stopped my entire works. I kept my presence o' mind all right; but I 'd 'a' been mighty glad to swap it off for absence of body. This was a most ghastly lookin' form, and I nestled up again' the side o' the wall, and felt my hand back for The. He crawled up alongside o' me, and when he spied it, he gave a start which made his teeth click. "What 's that?" he whispered.

It 's funny how the mind works. This form did n't resemble anything earthly; so I had n't really tried to figure on it much; but when The threw his question at me, I looked at the shape more careful, and grew ashamed o' myself. Here was I, a feller who had spent consid'able time around mines, and yet had got all balled up over seein' things underground.

"That 's your old friend, daylight, comin' down through a hole, The," I whispered so prompt that I doubt if he noticed any gap.

He gave a sniff through his nose, and then we crept on to where this light was comin' in through the opposite tunnel. It was mighty weak and sickly lookin' light, but the outline o' the tunnel mouth soon got perfectly plain to us. Every few inches we stopped to listen; but we got clear to the mouth without hearin' anything. Then we paused. Just at that time, I 'd have given right smart to have had my eyes fastened on like those of a lobster I once saw in a window down at Frisco. This insect had his eyes fixed

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to the ends o' fingers which he could stretch out in any direction.

To be honest, I felt some reluctant to push my face around that corner; but when I did there was n't a thing in sight. The tunnel stretched ahead of us for what seemed miles, but we could n't see the outer openin', although the light was strong enough to recognize each other by. The was a sight, for the bump on his head had leaked continuous; but it had n't disabled him none, so we drew back to consult a little.

If we had known whether they were ahead or behind us, it would have been easy to decide; but under the circumstances, we hardly knew what to do. Bein' in the dark was one thing; but bein' out where we could be seen was still another; so we thought full and deep.

After a few minutes I told The a little story about a feller I helped to pick up after he had jumped from a thirty-foot ledge onto a pile o' stone. "Why did you do it?" sez I. He blinked his eyes at me a time 'r two, hove a long sigh, an' said: "The' was a purple dragon in front o' me, a lot o' long-legged yaller snakes back o' me, and the peskiest pink jack-rabbit you ever saw kept swoopin' into my face an' peckin' at my eyes. If I ever drink another drop, I hope it 'll drown me."

The considered this story careful, an' then we crawled out into the tunnel, rose to our feet, an' ran along crouchin'. The tunnel ran upward at a sharp incline, which was why the light came down it so far. We kept to the right wall, and after goin' some distance, we came across a small cave. In this we found another dead Cross-brander; but we were n't enough interested in him to risk strikin' a light; so we sat down a moment to rest and listen.

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Presently we noticed some curious noises, but for some minutes we could n't decide on what they were. Suddenly The grabbed my wrist an' said: "That 's shootin'; that 's what that is!"

It was as plain as home-cookin' the minute he pointed it out; so we rose to our feet and made a rush for the mouth o' the cave. We came out about half way up the face o' the cliff; and for a moment we paused to admire Ty Jones's foxiness. This openin' could n't be seen from below, nor noticed from above, and for the most part the whole tunnel was natural, only havin' been hand-widened in three or four places.

The fightin' was goin' on near the face o' the cliff between us an' the mouth of the ravine; so we circled around until we caught sight of 'em. The first feller we made out was Mexican Slim; so we knew our boys had n't been ambushed up above, and this raised our spirits like a balloon. We crept up until we could get good angle-shots, hid ourselves, gave the old Diamond Dot yell, and began to shoot. Ty's men had been losin' their bullet-appetite for some time, and they took us to be genuwine reinforcements. They were well planted where they were, but they started to retreat, and we crowded 'em close.

Then it was that Ty made Olaf's word good: he exposed himself to shots, he rallied his men, and that wolf-grin never left his face; but still the tide had changed, and he had to go back with the rest. The woman, with her hands tied behind her, was in charge o' the Chink, who was tall and heavy-set with a dark, evil, leathery face. He kept a grin on his face, too, which reminded me most of a rattlesnake at sheddin' time. He used the woman as a shield, an' this checked our fire an' kept us dodgin' for new positions. Still,

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all in all, this part o' the fight was about as satisfactory as any I ever took part in.

Finally they retreated to the dip where the tunnel came out, and we had to skirmish up the rocks to keep our vantage. Soon we discovered that Ty had lost control of his men. He, Pepper Kendal, and two others stood in the mouth o' the tunnel, and took a few shots at us before disappearin'; but six of his men ran straight across the dip, and down the other side toward the crick. Tillte Dutch was standin' close to me, and I asked him where the hosses were. He said they were tied across the crick just above the upper ford; so I sent him for 'em full speed.

Horace and Tank stayed to watch the mouth o' the openin', while the rest of us wrangled the six Cross-branders through the cottonwoods. They had a good start, and so had time to cut the wire and cross the crick toward some broken land on the left. By this time Tillte had tied the reins and thrown 'em over the horns o' the saddles so as to lead a string, and he came lopin' into view.

Slim, two o' the Simpson boys, Olaf, and myself mounted and cut off the six Cross-branders, who were too weary to even scatter. They had had enough and surrendered. We tied their hands, and herded 'em back to the old shack, where Oscar, Spider, and three disabled Cross-branders were runnin' a little private hospital. We fixed up wounds as well as we could, sat the last six on a bench along the wall, and left Dick Simpson to guard 'em. Spider had been shot and cut consid'able; but he was able to stagger around some, while Oscar had been punctured below the ribs, and things looked bad for him. Olaf had been shot in the head, all right, just as The and I dove down the stairway the night before, but his skull was bullet-proof, so nothin' came of it.

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The Friar had been ransackin' the locality, and had found one o' the Simpson boys dead, and one badly hurt. Badly crippled, as we were, we did n't see any way to get at Ty except to starve him out. First off, we made some coffee, and those who were n't hurt dangerous were given some side-meat and corn bread; for, truth to tell, we were about once through. We spent the afternoon under a tree half way between the mouth o' the tunnel, and the old cabin, so as to be handy in case we were needed. After talkin' it all over, we could n't quite see why they had split up, some of 'em tryin' to escape, and some stayin' with Ty.

Finally I went to the cabin, durin' a time the Friar was on watch at the cave mouth, and picked out the weakest lookin' of the prisoners. I brought him down, and we tortured him with questions until he got fuddled and told us that the two who had stuck to Ty had been so bad hurt, they could n't go any farther; but that neither Ty nor Pepper were hurt to speak of.

The fact is, that in a general fight a feller loses his aim complete. We had all aimed at Ty and Pepper the most, and here they were the two not hurt at all. As darkness fell, the Friar could n't hold himself in. All afternoon he had done what he could for the wounded; but at thought of the woman spendin' another night in the cave with those men, he became as wild-eyed as a bronc at his first brandin'. Durin' the afternoon, Tank had stiffened until he could n't do much travelin'; but I saw the Friar had his mind made up to take a plunge, so I tried to fix things to prevent it.

Olaf, two o' the Simpson boys, Promotheus, Tillte, Slim, Horace, and myself lined up as bein' still in workin' order; but while he was in the act of claimin' to be all right, Slim doubled up in a faint, and we found he had been bad hurt

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without even himself knowin' of it; so countin' Horace who had two black eyes and a shot through the fore-arm, the' was seven of us able to get about purty nimble. Hid away in the cave, somewhere, were Ty Jones, Pepper Kendal, and the Chink, unhurt so far as we knew, and two others, still probably able to help a little.

We placed a couple o' logs again' the fake drawers in the library, and left Tank to take charge of the prisoners and the cabin. Then we rustled up some tarps from the bunk-shack, and prepared to camp near the openin' with a man allus on guard, to prevent them from comin' out — and the Friar from goin' in. We kept a lantern lit under shelter of a rock, and made ready to rest up a bit.

I had told all the fellers to watch the Friar close, for he just simply could n't get the upper hand of himself. He tried his best to simmer down and go to sleep, but every few minutes he 'd boil over again. I lay awake in my tarp watchin' him for some time; but I was so sore and weary myself I could scarcely recall what business I was on, and first I knew I had drifted off — and been shook awake again.

Promotheus was bendin' over me with the news 'at the Friar had decided to go into the tunnel, and they could n't hold him back. I sprang up and started for the opening with the rest following me. Dan Simpson had relieved The on watch and when he found what was in the Friar's mind, he had crept down and told The, who had awakened the rest of us.

We reached the Friar, just as he was goin' into the openin'. I called to him in a low tone; but he only shook his head. It was eleven o'clock, and the shadow from the moon had already crept out from the base o' the cliff almost to the openin'. I saw that the Friar had took the bit; so I whis-

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pered to the others: "I am goin' in there with him; but more 'n this would be bad. We 'd be in each other's way. Listen and watch, but do not follow us in."

"I know the way as well as you, and we could keep side by side," sez Promotheus; but I shook my head.

He came over to the openin' and said in a low tone: "I have n't time to make you understand; but — but I just have to go in with you."

"If you come, the rest 'll come too," sez I, exasperated.

"You fellers stay here," sez he to them in a pleadin' tone; "but I have reasons. I just have to go in."

So we shed our boots and started down the incline after the Friar, Promotheus touchin' my feet with his fingers at every step I crawled. I did n't want to be there, I could n't see how we could do any good; but the Friar had made my world for me, such as it was, and I understood better 'n the rest what was gnawin' at his heart; so I had n't any choice. I had to go in, and somethin' inside Promotheus drove him in also. The only crumb o' comfort I could find, lay in the fact that Horace had been winged, and so could n't foller us, whether he wanted to or not.

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CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

HAND TO HAND

At first it was black as pitch; but I crawled as fast as I could in the hope of catchin' up with the Friar. It is instinct with most men to follow the right wall when goin' through a strange place in the dark, though I never could see why. A man carries his weapon in the right hand and naturally ought to be as free with it as possible. Still, most men do it, so I follered the right wall, hopin' each time I put out my hand it would touch the Friar.

After a time, I saw a faint glimmer o' light to the left, and I stopped and pointed it out to The. We came to the conclusion that they had a candle lighted in the offset where we had come upon the body, and we discussed whether they were likely to be in there, or had gone on farther back and left the light to see any one who tried to crawl after 'em. I held out 'at they would n't expect any one to crawl after 'em; but The said 'at Ty would be likely to go into just such a place himself, and so would expect others to do the same. Ty certainly had the way of impressin' his own men.

When we got a little closer, I lay flat and scanned along the floor, tryin' to make out the Friar between me and the light; but I could n't see him, and we went on again. I hope I may never have to do any more such work as this. Creepin' along in the dark eats up a feller's nerve like a forest fire.

When we got so close 'at I could see my hands by the light, I sent The across to the other side, remindin' him to

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knock his teeth should he chance upon the Friar, or in case we come together again, ourselves.

Then I lay flat with my hat down low, and hudged myself along with my elbows and toes. I could n't even make out The across the tunnel, which was only about twelve feet wide, and just for the fraction of a second it came across me that he had formerly been a Cross-brander, himself; but this thought did n't live long enough to draw its second breath.

Finally I reached the spot where the light threw a splash on the walls and floor, and I made my gun ready and stuck out my neck in what was the most breathless silence I ever tried to listen to. Across the splash o' light in front of me, all was a solid wall o' darkness; and I 'd have paid over quite a sum to know what eyes were lookin' out of it.

Farther and farther I pushed myself into the light without seein' a thing; until finally I saw the candle, itself, and beside it — the Friar.

I wriggled across the tunnel just as The crept into the room from his side, and we felt a little better to be in the light, together again. The body still lay again' the wall, and The looked at the face; but he did n't know it. The Friar had n't seen or heard anything, either; and we were up a tree to the top branches. We talked it all over, tryin' to imagine what we would do under the same circumstances, and finally decided they had gone on down the tunnel, leavin' a man on guard just below the light, and that the man had gone to sleep.

"Well," sez I after we had discussed things around in a circle for a while, "here we are holed up again, as cozy as a cavey o' rats with traps set at all the openin's and en-thusiastic terrier dogs diggin' down from above. If it 's not bein'

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too inquisitive, Friar, what plan did you have in comin' down here?"

"I wanted to be close to her," sez Friar Tuck. "I kept thinkin' o' how lonely it must be for her through the dark, and I hoped the' might be some chance o' helpin' her to escape. I did not have any definite plan — only faith and hope."

"Like the shark which swallered the parasol," sez I, for I was consid'able put out; "he had faith in his digestion and hoped the parasol was some new sort o' health-food. But to get down to facts — Have you any weapon with you, and are you willin' to fight?"

"I have no weapon," sez the Friar; "but I am willin' to do whatever seems best. I am trusting in the same power which upheld Gideon, and I ask to see no farther than he saw."

This was the Friar all right, so I merely swallowed a couple o' times and did n't say anything. Whether he lived or died was the same to the Friar, as whether he lived in Idaho or Montana would be to another man; so I saved myself a certain amount of irritation by just thinkin' quietly as to what was best for us to try. Fact was, I did n't take as much stock in Gideon just then as I did in Ty Jones.

"I 'll tell you what I think is best," I sez after a bit; "for me to crawl down the hall in the hope that the watcher really has gone to sleep; while you two stand ready in this offset. If they chase me, I 'll run up the tunnel, and you spring out and take 'em at a disadvantage as they go by."

O' course they both wanted to do the crawlin', but it was my plan, so I stuck out for it, and started. I was really glad to be out o' the light again, and I crawled as gentle as though crossin' a bridge of eggs. Before long my fingers struck a

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boot, and I felt of it ex-treme-lee careful. If ever I go blind, my experience durin' those days will help consid'able in transferrin' my eyesight to my fingers.

The feller had toppled over again' the right wall, and I crept up alongside, holdin' my gun by the barrel, and ready to swat his head as soon as I had located it; but the' was no use — the man had already died. He had been shot twice, but they thought he could last a while on guard, and this was why we had been able to cross the lighted place.

Just beyond this, I came upon another offset, on the opposite side from where the candle was. We had n't noticed it that mornin' 'cause we had gone out along the other wall. I heard some heavy breathin' in here; but I also heard some one tossin' about an' mutterin', and I hardly dared risk an examination. I looked back at the splash of light, and it seemed mighty cheery and sociable, compared with the darkness and company I was in.

It 's astonishin' the way pictures fly across a feller's mind at such a time: I saw the boy down at the foot of the stairs, I saw him as he must have been, a few years before some quick, rash deed of his had drawn a veil across the laughter in his eyes; I saw the feller in the offset, and wondered how much it had taken to turn the expression of his face into that beastlike hunger for revenge, and then dozens of schemes and plans for capturin' Ty began to flash upon me; but each time, the presence of the woman spoiled everything. They had used her for a shield once, they would do it again, and I could n't see a way to get around her.

We knew 'at Ty had vowed he would never be taken alive; and I could n't see what we would do with him even if we did take him alive; but I could see that he would take pleasure in draggin' as big a bunch into the next world with him

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as possible, and yet every scheme 'at came to me was blocked by the presence of the woman. Finally I crept a little way into the offset. My hand touched a piece of cloth, I felt over it with nothin' except the ridges on my fingers touchin'; but just when I made sure it was the Chink, he moved and sat up. I stopped breathin'; but after a minute, he sighed and settled back.

I waited a little longer and then crawled back and told what I had discovered. "If the' was only some way we could throw a light into that offset," sez I, "I think we could fix 'em."

We studied over this for some time before the Friar thought up a way which seemed worth tryin'. I said I 'd go back and stay at the far side o' the openin', and when they brought the rope back, to come right on with it along the left wall, and I 'd knock my teeth together to show it was me — provided I was still there and able. So the Friar pulled off his boots, and The kept watch in the offset while the Friar ran back. I thought it must be several days since we 'd come in, but he looked at his watch before startin', and it was only two o'clock.

From where I was, I could make out the shape o' the feller they had put on watch, and knew I could keep cases on all within the little rock room. After an age, I saw two forms creep like ghosts out of the dark beyond the candle, and ooze into the offset without makin' a sound. Then in a moment, Promotheus came stealin' along the wall with the end of the rope. I made my signal to him, and he went on down the tunnel, slowly pullin' the rope after him.

I was mighty curious to see how they had fixed the lantern, which they were to light with the candle in the offset, and it made me feel a lot better when it came out of the

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recess. Horace had done the fixin', I afterward found out, and it had nearly broke his heart not to come in with it; but he realized that it was necessary to have an outer guard, so he had stayed with the two Simpson boys. He had put the lantern into a box after nailin' a couple o' short pieces of rope on the bottom for runners; and now it came slidin' along without makin' a sound. He had sawed a piece out of the side, so that all the light came up again' the ceilin', and onto the side where the openin' was.

Slowly it came along, and I stood in the shadow watchin' it. Finally it fell on the face of the man lyin' near the openin', and I saw he was one of those who had been at Skelty's that night — for all I know, it was his hand I had seen raisin' the window to my room. Next, it lighted up the openin', itself; and then The stopped pullin' and crept up opposite me. We heard 'em sighin' and groanin', in the recess, and finally the woman's voice gave a weary moan as she came awake.

In a second, Ty's voice was heard, askin' what was the matter; and we all braced up our nerves. A weak, delirious voice started to babble, but it was broken by a shot, and a bullet ripped through the box, but without puttin' out the light. I started across the hall; but The had already seen it, and had taken the rope and ran down the tunnel with it. He turned the box, so 'at just the left edge o' the light touched the openin', and then came across to my side. We were n't in a black shadow now; but still, with the light in their faces, it would have been hard to see us.

A hand reached out of the openin', and fired in our direction, I dropped to my knee and aimed at the hand, but neither shot counted; and for the next few minutes, all we heard was that weak voice, babblin' indistinctly. It had n't worked

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out as I thought it would. I figured that they 'd be surprised when the light shone in their faces, and would rush out and give us a chance. Now that it was too late, I thought up half a dozen better schemes.

Even while I was thinkin' up a perfect one, I saw a form come out from the recess, and threw my gun up — but I did n't snap the hammer. It was the woman, and behind her I could make out the shaved head o' the Chinaman.

We all stayed silent for some time, an' then Ty's voice said: "Well, what kind of a settlement do you fellers want?"

He spoke as self-composed as though puttin' through a beef-dicker, and no reply was made for several seconds. Then, as no one else spoke, I sez: "All we want is just the woman and what 's left o' your outfit, Ty."

"Who 's that speakin'?" sez Ty.

"He 's generally called Happy Hawkins, Ty," sez I.

"Who 's in charge o' your gang?" sez he.

"Dinky Bradford," sez I after thinkin' a moment; "but I 'm delegated to speak for him."

"Tell ya what I 'll do," sez Ty; "I 'll trade ya the woman for Dinky Bradford an' the Singin' Parson. Send those two in to me, and I 'll send her out to you."

This was the foolest proposition ever I heard of. The woman would n't 'a' been any use to us without the Friar. "Dinky Bradford is guardin' the mouth o' the tunnel," sez I; "but he would n't stand for any such nonsense, nohow."

"Is the preacher here?" asked Ty.

"Yes, I am here," sez the Friar, steppin' out from the offset and comin' toward us. Olaf, who was with him, caught his arm and kept him from exposin' himself.

"Damn you," sez Ty, slow an' deliberate. "I hate you

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worse 'n any man in this territory. You 're at the bottom of all this kick-up. You 're the one which has turned my own men again' me; and all I ask is a chance to settle it out with you."

"You 're mistaken if you think that I advised this method," began the Friar; but Ty broke in, and said: "Never mind any o' that preacher-talk. I know what 's what, and I 'm all prepared to have you hide behind your religion, after havin' started all the trouble. I 'll offer you a plan which any man would accept — but I don't class you as a man. The fair way to settle this would be for the men who are with us to empty their guns an' lay 'em on the floor, then you and me strip to the waist an' fight it out with knives. They have n't anything at stake; but I suppose you 'll be true to your callin', and make them take all the risk."

"I want to be true to my callin'," sez the Friar; "and fightin' with knives is n't part o' my callin'."

Ty laughed as mean as a man ever did laugh; and both Olaf and I offered to take the Friar's place; but Ty said he did n't have anything special again' us any more 'n he 'd have again' the Friar's ridin' hoss; and then he offered to fight the Friar and Dinky Bradford at the same time.

He kept on roastin' the Friar till I bet I was blushin'; but the Friar just stood out straight in the gloom o' the tunnel and shook his head no. Then the woman took a half step forward, an' the Chink jerked her back, twistin' her wrist and makin' her give a smothered scream.

I had moved the box around to give us a little more light; and when she screamed, I saw the blood rush up the Friar's pale face to his eyes, where it burst into flame. Livin' fire it was, and in a flash it had burned away his religion, his scruples again' violence, the whole outer shell o' civilization,

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and left him just a male human with his woman in the power of another. "Strip," he said, and his words rolled down the tunnel like a growl of a grizzly. "Strip, and fight for your life, for I intend to destroy you."

I can still hear the laugh Ty gave when the Friar said this. "Destroy me?" he said. "Destroy me? That 's a good one! Now, do your men agree to let us go free if I win?"

"I do," sez The.

"I do," said I, after I 'd taken another look at the Friar, who was already unbuttonin' his shirt.

"I do — if you fight fair," said Olaf slowly.

"Then one of ya hold the lantern while we empty the guns," said Ty.

I did n't like this part of it; but could n't see any way out; so while The held the lantern, one on each side emptied a gun and tossed it to the center of the tunnel. We emptied all of ours, and they emptied all of theirs, and then while Ty was takin' off his shirt, I went up to the Friar. When I saw the taut muscles ripplin' beneath his white skin, I felt comforted; but when I saw him holdin' his knife point down, the way they do in the picture-books, I got worried again.

"Take your knife the other way, Friar," I whispered; "and strike up under the floatin' ribs on his left side. That 's the way to his heart."

"I know how to fight with a knife," he snapped; so I did n't say any more. Horace had become a gun-fighter, here was the Friar claimin' to know the knife game, and if the woman had stepped out and challenged the winner to a fight with stones, why, I was so meek I would n't 'a' got het up over it.

Then Ty Jones came out of the other offset, stripped to

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the waist also and holdin' his knife in his left hand. The woman had gone into the niche on our side, me an' Olaf leaned again' our wall, Pepper Kendal and the Chink leaned again' the wall opposite us, The held up the lantern, and for a full minute the only sound was the wounded Cross-brander, babblin' out his delirium back in the cave-room.

Ty was a shade beefier 'n the Friar; but his skin was dull, and the muscles did n't cut off into the tendons so sharp, nor they did n't seem quite so springy or well oiled; but there was half a dozen knife scars on his chest, and he had come up our way from Mexico.

They walked toward each other, Ty's eagle eyes an' wolf-grin tryin' to beat down the grim set to the Friar's face. They both crouched over an' circled about each other like a pair o' big cats. Ty made a few lunges, but the Friar parried 'em as simple as though it was a game, and purty soon Ty was forced to slip his knife to his right hand with the blade pointin' up for a rip. When he did this, the Friar smiled, turned his own knife the same way; and I recalled the Friar havin' told me about learnin' knife tricks from an I-talian he had helped back East.

I don't like knife fightin', and I don't approve of it; but I will say 'at this fight was the cleanest, quickest thing I ever saw. The Friar was the best man, but Ty was the best posted; and time and again the Friar saved himself by foot work. The follered 'em close with his lantern, while Olaf and I kept a half watch on the two opposite us.

They kept movin' faster and faster and the' was a continuous spattin' as they parried with their left hands. Finally the Friar grabbed Ty by the wrist, Ty grabbed the Friar's wrist at the same time, lowered his head, and butted the Friar in the pit o' the stomach. It looked bad; but the Friar had

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raised his knee and caught Ty on the chin; so they staggered apart and breathed deep for a minute, before beginnin' again.

The grin had left Ty's face, and it had settled into black hate. When they began again, the Friar seized Ty's wrist every chance he got, twistin' it, bendin' the arm, and tryin' to thrust with his knife; but Ty was tough and wiry, and managed to twist out every time. At last the Friar caught Ty's right wrist, dropped his own knife, ran his head under Ty's right arm, caught the slack of his right pant leg, gave a heave and threw him over his head. It was a clean throw and the Friar stooped, picked up his knife and started for Ty before he had time to get to his feet. Ty rolled to his feet and dodged away as though to run, whirled, took the blade of his knife between thumb and forefinger, and spun it through the air. It struck the Friar's collarbone, cut a gash through his shoulder, and twanged again' the wall o' the tunnel.

The two men eyed each other for a moment, the calm of victory in the Friar's eyes, the red of baffled hate in Ty's. They were about eight feet apart. "Will you give up?" asked the Friar.

"No," sez Ty. He doubled up his fists as though to spring, then whirled and stepped into the offset behind him. In a moment, he came out with a gun in his hand.

As soon as he had said no, Pepper Kendal an' the Chink had made a dive for the offset, and Olaf and I had made a dive for them. I got Pepper who was old and stiff, and I managed to hit him in the center o' the forehead just as Ty came out with his gun. Olaf was havin' trouble with the Chink, and I picked up a gun and tapped Pepper on the head with it, and then turned to knock the Chink. Just as I

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turned, I saw the woman walkin' slowly down the tunnel behind the Friar, and I saw Ty bend his gun on him. Even then he had to pause a moment to enjoy his deviltry, and I still see that picture in my dreams — the Friar standin' silent and proud, with his head thrown back and his level eyes full on Ty, while back of him stood the woman as unconcerned as a snow-bird. About six feet beyond 'em stood Promotheus holdin' the light above his head, while his face seemed frozen with horror.

For an instant they stood like stone images. Then The lunged forward and caught Ty's arm, the lantern went out, I heard one clear report, and one muffled one, and then I started for 'em. I bumped into a heavy form, two naked arms went around me in a bear-grip, and we rolled to the floor. The candle in our offset had burned out; but I knew it was the Friar, 'cause his was the only smooth face among us. "This is Happy," I muttered, and we rose to our feet.

A struggle was goin' on beyond us, and I thought it was Olaf and the Chink; so I lit a match, knowin' that Ty would 'a' had plenty o' time to get away already. As the match burned up, I saw the Chink lyin' stretched out, and Olaf and Ty locked together. Olaf had his leg wrapped around Ty's, and was bendin' his back. Ty's eyes were stickin' out white an' gruesome, and he was gurglin' in the throat. Suddenly, somethin' cracked and they both fell to the floor o' the tunnel just as the match went out.

I heard hard breathin', and then Olaf's harsh voice came out o' the darkness. "Well," he said, "I guess that squares things."

"What 's happened, what 's happened?" asked a panting voice, and then I knew 'at Horace had n't been able to stand it any longer, and had come in, game wing and all.

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"We 've settled up with Ty Jones — that 's what 's happened," said Olaf; and as we stood there in the gloom, the drip o' the dawn came rollin' cold and gray down the slant o' the tunnel; and I shuddered and turned away to find somethin' for my hands to do.

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THE GIFT OF THE DAWN

THE first thing I did was to light the lantern, for the daylight which came down there was too much in keepin' with the conditions to suit me. Promotheus was doubled up an' holdin' his side; so the first thing I did was to ask him if he was bad hurt. The' was a smile on his lips, a regular satisfied, self-composed smile, but I did n't just like the look in his eyes.

" Nope, I don't ache at all, Happy," he said in a firm voice; " but I can't move much. Tend to the others first."

It seems 'at Ty's first shot had hit the woman in the head, and his next had got The in the side — but The had managed to get the gun away from him, which is why the rest of us were spared.

The Friar had carried the woman into our offset, and was rubbin' her wrists and workin' over her, though the' did n't appear to be much use. She was still alive; but that was just all, so I left them and examined the rest. Ty was all twisted out o' shape, and lay with his eyes open, glassy an' stary and horrible. Olaf had n't had time to quite finish the Chink, and he was crawlin' down the tunnel when I nabbed him. Then Horace took the lantern while Olaf and I hog-tied Pepper Kendal and the Chink.

We next examined the cave-room where Ty had made his last stand. It was fair-sized an' well stocked, and also had half a dozen extra guns in it. When I saw these fresh guns,

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I gave a low whistle to think what a lot o' suckers we 'd been to discard our own trumps and set in a game against a marked deck; but as the Friar allus said: "Wrong feeds on death and Right feeds on life; so the' can't be no doubt as to the final result, even though things do look blue sometimes."

There was a fine spring in the corner o' this room — the same spring which afterwards came out near the mouth of the ravine and was piped into the old cabin. The wounded Cross-brander was still babblin', so we fed him some water and eased him around a little.

Next we went outside and nailed some pieces to a couple o' light poles, and we were mighty glad to have enough left to man this vehicle when it was finished, for we were all purt nigh used up, Tillte, the two Simpson boys, and myself carried the litter, while Horace ran the illumination, and Olaf tended to Pepper and the Chink.

We took 'em all out, even to the dead; and the one at the foot of the stairs turned out to be the boy, just as I 'd thought. Next to the woman, with the Friar walkin' beside her his head on his breast, this trip with the boy cut me worse 'n any. Promotheus got off three average good jokes while we were packin' him out, and cheered us up a lot; but we put Ty Jones down with the dead. As we straightened him out he gave a groan which made us all jump. The whole thing had become a nightmare, and we staggered about like the ingredients of a dream.

The woman's head was shattered on top an' the' was n't any hope for her; but still, it gave the Friar comfort to work over her, so we acted as though we thought she had a chance. The nearest doctor was at Meltner's stage station, a full day's ride. Tillte went after him, while Dan

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Simpson rode over to his father's to break the news and bring back Kit. What with the prisoners still on our hands, the dead to bury, and the wounded to wait on, we were in chin-deep; and the worst of it was, 'at we did n't want the news to get out. We had tried to settle things without botherin' the law, and we preferred to finish that way if possible.

We buried the four Cross-branders across the crick and down stream from the lower ford, and we buried Tim Simpson just a little way above the upper ford. The Friar went along and helped dig the graves and carry them to it; but he did n't preach nor sing, and his face was drawn with sorrow.

By evenin' we had got things to some system. Spider, Tank, Slim, and Horace were able to help quite a little; but Oscar, Tom Simpson, and Promotheus were in bad shape; while we had seven prisoners, countin' the Chink, and seven wounded enemies to look after. The feller Horace had shot, up on top, got out o' the country, I reckon. Anyway they left him above with the horses, and we never heard of him again.

Ol' man Simpson, Kit, and the boy arrived durin' the moonlight, and we were all mighty glad to see Kit, though we hated to face the old man. Still, he was game, and took it mighty well. Tillte had got a fresh hoss at Meltner's and had started right back witl. the doctor; so they arrived a little after seven next mornin'. The doctor was purty young lookin' to me; but he had a bagful o' shiny instruments, and he made himself at home without any fuss. He had been in a Colorado hospital for two years, a minin' hospital, and he was as familiar with a feller's insides, as a pony is with the range he was foaled on. He had took a

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claim near Meltner's, and was able to talk a long time on why it was better for a young doctor to come west.

He praised the Friar's work to the skies — and then turned in and did it all over to suit himself. He said that all the wounded stood a good show except the woman, Promotheus, and Ty Jones. We none of us thought 'at The was in much danger; but the doctor shook his head. Ty's spinal column had been unjointed near the base, and he was paralyzed from the hips down; but in all that skirmishin', he was the only one who had n't lost a drop o' blood. The Friar, himself, had two flesh-wounds beside the one Ty had give him.

I was with the doctor when he started to work on the woman's head; but I could n't stand it. I 'm not overly squeamish; but I own up I could n't stand this; so I backed out, leavin' the Friar with his face like chalk, to hand instruments while little old Kit held a basin. I hated to leave 'em; but I did n't take a full breath until I was beside Promotheus again.

His voice had got weaker, but the smile never left his lips, and it was restful just to sit and watch him. Horace hovered over him like a young hen, and The drank so much water, simply to please Horace, that I feared his bones would dissolve. Horace had told the doctor he would pay all the bills, and to go the full limit and not try to economize none on his patch-work. We put the seven prisoners in the workshop, and slept in tarps around the door, which was fastened with a chain, so 'at if they got it open, a board would fall on these sleepin' next, and wake 'em.

The Friar was all for notifyin' the authorities; but old man Simpson had been a notorious public, or some such official, back in Vermont and naturally he was up on all

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the twists and windin's of the law. He said it would take the Su-preme Court itself fifteen years to sift out the actual legalities of our tangle; and even then he was n't sure which side would get the worst of it, so he advised us to just work it out on our own hook, which we had decided to do anyway.

For three days, the woman lay in a stupor. Kit had told me that her skull had n't been actually shattered — that she had been shot in just about the same way that Olaf had, but that Nature had counted on Olaf gettin' into some such a fix, and had provided for it by givin' him a flint skull, while the woman's skull was n't of much use except in times of peace. Kit said the doctor had taken out a few splinters of bone, and had fastened up the openin', but had said the' was n't any show for her.

On the other hand, Olaf had looked at her careful, and had said that all the vital part of her was workin' on just this point. He said that the light about her body was the blue o' weakness; but that just at this point, the' was a constant bulgin' out o' different colors in a way he had never before seen. The doctor heaved up his eyebrows at Olaf's verdict, and looked as though he thought perhaps Olaf's brain had been shifted a little out o' line, in spite of his flint skull.

On the third night I was what the doctor called his orderly, and went on duty at midnight. I was sittin' out on the porch of the old cabin when the Friar came out holdin' his hand across his eyes. We had moved the wounded men over to the bunk-shack, and the woman was in Ty's bedroom. I did n't speak to him, and he stood leanin' against one o' the posts for some time without seein' me.

He trembled all over, and his breath came quick and

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catchy. Finally he looked up at the stars and said in a low tone, as though speakin' personal to some one near at hand: "Save me, oh God, from mockery! I have spoken for others in my vanity; and now that my own hour has come, oh save me from the rebellion of my flesh; and give me grace to say in my heart, Thy will be done."

As he stood with his face upraised, the late moon crept out and shone full upon it, and the agony in it struck me like a blow; but even as I looked, the change came. Before my very eyes, I saw the sign of peace made upon the Friar's brow. A moment before and it had been torn into wrinkles and covered with beads of sweat; but now it was smooth and calm. He clasped his hands across his breast, closed his eyes, and the' came a smile to his lips which drew a mist to my own eyes. I can't be absolutely certain of it, because o' this blur in my eyes; but I think, I actually and honestly do think, that I saw white forms hoverin' in the moonlight above him.

He drew a full breath and turned to go in, but saw me settin' with my back again' the wall o' the cabin, and came over and put a hand on my shoulder. I could n't say anything. I wanted to say somethin' to comfort him; but I could n't speak a word, until he asked me how the others were gettin' along. I told him they were all doin' fine, and that even Ty had been restin' well. He turned to go in, and then I found the nerve to ask him how things were inside.

"It is all over, Happy," sez he, without even a catch in his voice. "Just before I came out here, the doctor said the pulse had stopped."

He caught his breath with a little gasp at this; but that was all. "What did Olaf say?" I asked.

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"Olaf says that she still lives," he answered; "but I fear that Olaf is not to be relied upon this time. He has a strange gift; but he does not understand it himself, and while I know he would not deceive me, I feel that the doctor must know best."

"Well, I 'll not give up until Olaf does!" I blurted.

He smiled again and put his hand back on my shoulder. "Come in and look at her," he said, "she is very beautiful. The strange mask has fallen from her face, and she is once more as she was in those old, happy days when we walked together through our own Garden of Eden. Come in, I want you to see her."

I went in with him, though I did n't want to. I knew what love did to a man, and that I had n't seen the same woman he had; but the' was another face allus before my eyes, and no one else was beautiful to me. I did n't want to do any pertendin' to the Friar, even at such a time as this.

I follered him inside, feelin' out o' place and embarassed; but when I looked down at the quiet face in the bed, I was glad I had come. She did n't look like the same woman, not at all. All the weary, puzzled expression had left her face, and in spite of its whiteness, it looked like the face of a girl. I looked at her a long time and the thought that came to me over and over was, what a shame she could n't have had just a few words with the Friar before she was called on; just a few words, now that her right mind was back.

After a time I looked up. Kit sat near the head of the bed, leanin' over and holdin' a handkerchief to her eyes, Olaf sat near her, a strange, grim set to his lips. His head was bandaged and he looked less like a human than usual,

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as he kept his eyes fixed on the white face o' the woman. The' was a lamp on the stand and I could see his eyes. Blue they were, deep blue, like the flowers on the benches in June, and they did n't move; but kept a steady gaze upon the white, still face. The doctor sat in a corner, his eyes on the floor. At first I thought he was asleep, and goodness knows, he was entitled to it; but just as I looked at him he rubbed his fingers together a moment and stood up.

He walked over and put his hand on the Friar's shoulder. "You might as well all go to sleep, now," he said, gently. "There is nothing more to do."

"Are you positive?" asked the Friar.

"Positive," said the doctor. "There is no heart action, and when I held a mirror to her lips no vapor was formed."

"She is still alive," said the deep voice of Olaf, and we all gave a little start.

The doctor took a silver quarter and held it to the woman's nose for a minute, and then looked at it. A puzzled look came to his face, and he went back and sat down in the corner again.

"Was it discolored?" asked the Friar.

"No," sez the doctor slowly; "but I am sure there is no life remaining. I have seen several cases of suspended anomation, but nothin' like this."

"She lives, and the light is getting stronger," said Olaf.

Kit took the handkerchief from her eyes which were still full o' tears. She wiped them away, and looked first at the woman and then at Olaf, and then she gave a sigh. The Friar's hands were opening and shutting. He had fought his fight out, on the porch; but the suspense was beginnin' to undermine him again.

I went back to the porch and stayed a while. When I

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went in again, they were all as I had left them; and after a few minutes I made my rounds, found everything all right, and came back. I went into the room several times, and just as I caught the first whiff o' the dawn breeze, I went in once more, determined to coax the Friar to lie down and try to sleep.

They were still in the same positions. Not a line had changed in the woman's face, the Friar was almost as white as she was but still stood at the foot o' the bed lookin' down at her; while the wrinkles on Olaf's set face seemed carved in stone.

I had just put my hand on the Friar's arm to get his attention when Olaf rose to his feet, pressed his hand to his blinkin' eyes, and said wearily: "The blue color is givin' way to pink. She will get well."

"Don't say it unless you 're sure!" cried the Friar, his voice like a sob.

For answer Olaf pointed down at the woman's face. A faint color stole into her cheeks, and as we looked her eyes opened. The first thing they rested upon was the Friar's face bent above her, and her lips parted in a wonderin' smile — a smile which lighted her face like the mornin' sun on ol' Mount Savage, and made her beautiful, to me an' to all who 've ever seen her.

"Is it you?" she whispered. "Is it really you?"

A warm, rosy beam of sunshine slipped in through the window and fell across the bed, and the rest of us tiptoed out, leavin' the Friar alone with the gift of life which the Dawn had brought back to him.

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CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

TY JONES NODS HIS HEAD

It was a week after this before Olaf could see properly again. The doctor was wild to take Olaf back East and hold doin's with him; but Olaf would n't listen to it. He hated to have people take him for a freak, and said it was n't any fault of his that he saw the way he did. The doctor said 'at what Olaf saw was called the aurora; he said that science had been tryin' to locate it, but had n't found any way to do it, and that it was some sort o' rays shootin' out from this which had put the inflammation into Olaf's eyes.

Olaf had had one of his teeth filled when he was young, and ever since that he 'd been suspicious o' science; so he just clouded up his face when they tried to devil him into bein' an experiment, and they could n't do anything with him. The Friar might have been able to, but the Friar would have sent his own eyes East by freight before he 'd have asked Olaf to do a single thing he did n't want to do. The ignorant allus scoff at the idee of Olaf seein' the soul-flame; but the edicated allus take a serious interest which seems mighty funny — don't it?

From the very moment Janet opened her eyes and smiled up at the Friar that mornin' she continued to improve. The doctor listened to all that was told him about her havin' pains in the top of her head and not bein' right intellectually, and he said she must have had a blow there at some former time which had probably formed a tumor on the

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brain or knocked off a few splinters of bone into it, and that in removin' the pressure, she had been put into perfect order again.

She had the smoothest voice I had ever heard, and I just doted on hearin' her speak the Friar's name, John Carmichael. I had a legal right to use the name John, myself; but it allus had the feel of a stiff collar to me, so I was glad enough to have it forgotten. But when Janet spoke the words John Carmichael, why, it cleared up the atmosphere and started a little breeze. She did n't recall how she had come to Cross Crick, nor anything much which had happened to her since the night in Berlin. She said she had took singin' lessons in a place called Italy, and had expected to reach grand opery.

She had sung for pay whenever she got a chance, in order to get money enough to go on with her studies, and was gettin' what I 'd call mighty lucrative wages at the Winter Garden; but was all the time bothered by a lot o' foreign dudes who had the desire to make love, but not the capacity. She said her manager had introduced an Austrian count for advertizin' purposes, and she had finally consented to eat a meal with him; but had been taken sick and had fallen. This was when she had bumped her head and she never got clear in it again until that morning when she had hovered between goin' out with the night or comin' back with the dawn.

She said she had a hazy, dreamlike remembrance of havin' tried all kinds o' work after this; but could n't tell the real from the unreal; and she did n't have any recollection of how she had come to the ranch. We never mentioned Ty Jones to her for she was comin' along like a colt on grass, and we did n't want to risk any set-back. She said she still

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had it on her mind that she had lost something precious; but she could n't make out what it could have been, and the Friar allus told her not to worry, but to just rest herself back to complete strength.

Oscar and Tom Simpson had turned the corner, and it was only a question of time when they 'd be all right again — which was true of all the others except Ty and Promotheus. Ty would n't speak to us at all, though he did n't seem to suffer to amount to anything. The doctor said he might live for years, or he might slip away at a moment's notice; but either way, he was doomed to be paralyzed for the rest of his life; while the' was n't any hope for Promotheus at all.

He had been shot through the liver, which pleased him a lot as bein' so in keepin' with his name; but we could n't see why a feller who had survived bein' shot in so many other places, should have to give in on account of an extra hole in his liver. Horace divided his time between waitin' on The and spurrin' up the doctor to try some new treatment. He read aloud to The out o' Ty's books, and he seemed as fond o' those old Greek fellers as Horace was himself. He was also mighty pleased to have the Friar read and talk to him, and it softened us all a lot to see how patient and gentle Promotheus had become. Humanity is about the finest thing the' is about a human; and all humans have a showin' growth of it, if ya can just scratch the weeds away and give it a chance.

The prisoners bothered us a heap; we feared they might have some leanin's toward revenge; so we did n't dare turn 'em loose until they showed some decided symptoms of repentance. Finally we got to bringin' 'em up two at a time to talk with The. At first it did n't do any good, as Ty sat

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propped up in a bunk, grinnin' scornful, while The lay flat on his back lookin' mighty weak and wan; but after several trials at it, they seemed to pay more heed to what The told 'em. We figured that Ty must have ten or a dozen men still out on the range somewhere; but they never showed up.

In about two weeks, or it might 'a' been three, all the wounded were able to walk about except Promotheus, Ty Jones, and Oscar. Oscar was doin' fine; but the noise of the other men bothered The a little at night, though he denied it up and down. Still, we thought best to move him and Ty to a couple o' cots at the east end of the mess-hall, which was large and airy, with a big fireplace for cool nights. By this time Janet was able to take short walks, leanin' on the Friar's arm; but the Friar had n't come any closer to findin' out what it was she had lost, nor whether or not she was Ty's wife. The only reply Ty ever made to questions, was to skin back his lips in a wolf-grin.

The used to lay with his eyes fixed on Ty's face and a look of hopeless sadness in his own. When we 'd come and talk to him, his face would light up; but as soon as we left him, he would look at Ty again with a sorrow that fair wrung a feller's heart. I wanted to separate 'em; but when I suggested this to The, he shook his head. "Nope," he said, "he may speak to me before the vultures finish with my liver; and if ever the mood crosses his mind for a second, I want to be so handy 'at he won't have time to change his mind."

I told The 'at what was worryin' the Friar most was that all the fightin' had been on his account; but that next to this, it was because he did n't know whether or not Ty was married to Janet.

That evenin' just when the thinky time o' twilight came

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along, I was settin' by the fire in the mess-hall, where I could see Ty, and his face did n't have quite so much the eagle look to it as common. The's eyes rested on Ty's face most o' the time, and he, too, noticed it bein' a little less fierce than usual.

"Ty," he said in a low tone, "I was drove into turnin' again' ya. Not by force, ya understand, nor by fear; but by something which has crept into me durin' the last few years, and which I can't understand, myself. Horace and the Friar have been mighty good to me — they saved my life, ya know, after I had forfeited it by raidin' 'em durin' the night. I told 'em I would n't be a spy on you about anything else except the woman. You have n't much excuse to bear me any ill will, seein' as it was your own hand which shot the move-on order into me. I 'm goin' to slip out yonder before long; but the's no knowin' how long you 'll have to sit penned up in a chair."

The's voice gave out here, and he stopped a few minutes to cough. Ty's face had n't changed, and his eyes looked out through the south window to where the western sky was still lighted into glory by the rays o' the sun, which had already sunk.

"I 've been locked up in a stone prison, Ty," said Promotheus as soon as he had quieted down again; "and I want to tell you that the minutes drag over ya like a spike-tooth harrow, when you have n't nothin' to look at but four gray walls and the pictures on your memory. A feller feeds himself on bitter recollections in order to keep his hate lusty; but all this pilin' up o' hate is just one parchin' hot day after another — like we 've had this summer. Everything green and pleasant in a feller's nature is burned down to the roots, and in tryin' to hate all the world, he ends by hatin'

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himself worst of all. Every kindly deed he 's done seems like a soothin' shower, and counts a lot in keepin' him from fallin' down below the level o' snakes and coyotes.

" I 'm not preachin' at ya, I 'm tellin' you just what I know to be so from actual experience. I don't bear you no ill will, Ty, whether you tell me what I want to know, or not; but you have it in your power to give me more content than airy other man in all the world. Are you married to the woman, Ty? "

For a moment Ty did n't move, and then his lips tightened and he nodded his head. Promotheus gave a sigh and settled back. He stayed quiet for some time and then said in a weak voice: " Thank ya, Ty. I 'm purty certain that at such a time as this, you would n't deceive me. I 'm sorry you are married to her — on the Friar's account, understand — but I 'm mightily obliged to you for tellin' me the truth. The Friar is a square man, and he 's a strong man. He 'll be able to fight what he has to fight; but none of us can fight uncertainty, without losin' our nerve in the end. I wish you would talk to me, Ty. I thought more o' you than of airy other man I ever knew, except Horace and the Friar; and I wish, just for old time's sake, you 'd talk to me a little before I slip away. You can talk, can't ya? "

" Yes, I can talk," sez Ty Jones, facin' The with a scowl; " but I have n't any talk I want to waste on traitors. If I was to speak at all, it would be to ask 'em to separate me from your sloppy yappin'. You may think 'at you sound as saintly as a white female angel when you whine about duty and forgiveness and such-like rubbish; but the more oil you put on your voice, the more I know you to be a sneak, a hypocrite, and a traitor. I won't ask 'em to move me; because I 'm not in the habit of *askin'* any man. When I

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had two legs to stand on, I gave orders. Now that I can't give orders, I don't speak at all; but every time you try to speak like a hen-missionary, you can know that I 'm sayin' to myself — sneak, hypocrite, traitor!"

One thing you 'll have to say about Ty Jones, an' that is, that when he started north, he did n't wobble off to the east or west much, let what would come in his path. The only reply The made was to sigh; but what I wanted to do, was to lull Promotheus into a deep sleep, and then to fasten Ty Jones's neck to a green bronco, and let them two settle it out between 'em which was the tougher beast. What I did do, was to steal out and tell Horace what had been said, and I also told him not to separate Ty and Promotheus as I thought The would set him an example which might finally soften him a little and make him more fit to die, when the time came 'at some quick tempered individual lost patience and tried to knock a little decent conversation out of him with an ax.

Horace, though, thought only o' The, and he hurried in and sat beside him. I also went in and took my seat by the fire again. Horace took The's hand in one of his and patted it with the other. Horace did n't have any upliftin' words to match the Friar's; but he had some chirky little ways which were mighty comfortin' to The, and when Horace would be with him, all the sadness would leave his eyes, and he would talk as free as he thought — which, to my mind, is the final test of genuwine courage.

Mighty few of us can do it. I know I can't. Time and again, I have had deep feelin's for some one in trouble; but when I 'd try to put 'em into words, the knees o' my tongue would allus knock together, and I 'd growl out somethin' gruff, cough, blow my nose, and get into a corner as soon as

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possible. The Friar was the first man who ever showed me 'at a feller could speak out his softness without losin' any of his strength, and I have honestly tried to do it myself; but I generally had to dilute it down over half, and even then, it allus sounded as though I had wrote it out and learned it by heart.

The asked Horace to either move him or Ty, said he did n't feel quite comfortable beside Ty, and made out that it was his own wish; but Horace vetoed the motion, and pertended to scold The for not havin' a more forgivin' nature. The thought he had been as circumspect as a land agent, and when his request rebounded back on him, he found himself without any dry powder.

He lay quiet for some time, and then spoke in so low a tone I could hardly hear him. "I can understand the real Promotheus purty well, Horace," sez he; "and I 've tried to be as game as he was; but I can't quite understand the One the Friar tells about. I have thought of Him a heap since I 've been laid up this time; but I don't believe I could bring myself to forgive them who had nailed me on a cross for doin' nothin' but good — I don't believe I could do that.

"I can feel things clearer now 'n I ever could before; and when I picture my own self as hangin' from nails drove through my hands and feet, it just about takes my breath away. I 've been handled purty rough in my time, but allus when my blood was hot, and pain don't count then; but to have nails drove — My God, Horace, that 's an awful thought! That 's an awful thought.

"Then, too, I don't feel that any one has ill used me lately. The treatment I got in the army, and in the pen, was consid'able hellish; but I have n't had much chance to try forgivin' any one for the last few years. Horace, you can't

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imagine all the joy the last part of my life has been to me. I did n't know what life really was, until you and the Friar pointed it out to me. I 've been so happy sometimes it has hurt me in the throat; and now that I 'm goin' on, I don't want to cause any one any bother. I asked Ty to tell me if he was married to the woman, and he did tell me. I 'm sorry to say 'at he is married to her, Horace; but I 'm thankful to Ty for tellin' me. He don't feel easy near me; so I wish you 'd move me back to the bunk-shack."

It was some minutes before Horace could speak, and when he did, he had to put on pressure to keep his voice steady. "I don't care one single damn what Ty Jones wants," sez he. "Let him stay right where he is and learn the meanin' of friendship from the best friend a man ever had." After which Horace gave The's hand a grip and hurried out of the room.

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CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

THE LITTLE GUST O' WIND

I HAVE seen some mighty quick changes brought about by flood o' circumstances breakin' on a man all of a sudden — ol' Cast Steel Judson, himself, had melted and run into a new mold the night o' Barbie's weddin' — but I never saw such a complete change as had took place in The since I 'd first seen him. He loved devilment then, like a bear loves honey; while now he had swung back with the pendulem clear to the other side, until he was more unworldly 'n the Friar himself. It was n't what he said 'at made a feller feel funny inside, it was his eyes. His eyes were all the time tryin' to tell things 'at his tongue could n't frame up, and it acted like brakes on a feller's breathin' apparatus.

I asked the Friar about it one evenin' while we were walkin' back through the ravine. He walked along with his brows wrinkled a few minutes, and then said: "You see, Happy, the whole human race is made up o' millions of individuals, and each one is some alike and some different. A man goes through childhood, youth, his fightin' period, and old age; and the race has to do the same thing.

"Now, ages ago when the childhood o' the race began, folks were downright primitive; they used stone axes, skins for clothing, and ate raw flesh. They were fierce, impulsive, passionate, just like children are if you watch 'em close enough; but they lived close to nature, just like the children

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do, and their bodies were vigorous, and their minds were like dry sponges, ready to absorb whatever fell upon 'em.

"The outdoor man of to-day is still primitive; he delights in his dissipations, and recklessness, but the grim, set face which he wears, is a mask. The rich, pure air is all the time washin' his body clean, his active life keeps his nerves sound and accurate, and his heart is like the heart of a little child — hungry for good or evil, and needin' a guiding hand all the time.

"In the mornin' a child is so full o' life that words don't mean much to him; but when the play o' the day is over, he comes home, through the twilight shadows, bruised an' disappointed an' purty well tired out. All day long he 's waged his little wars; but now he is mighty glad to pillow his head close to his mother's heart; and then it is that the seeds o' gentleness are easiest sprouted. This is the twilight time for Promotheus."

We did n't have anything more to say on this walk; but we both had plenty to think of. It allus seemed to me that in some curious way, the Friar, himself, was better 'n his own religion. His religion made badness a feller's own fault; but after gettin' to know the Friar, it allus made ya feel more like takin' some share in the other feller's sin, than like pointin' your finger at him and sayin' he never was any good, nohow.

A couple o' days after this, the doctor told us that the sands were runnin' mighty low in The's hour-glass, and it would n't be long to the end; but still we could n't believe it. He did n't look bad, nor he did n't suffer; and we had seen him come back from the grave almost, that time at Olaf's when Horace had claimed his life, and had saved him in spite of himself.

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Then again, the doctor had missed it on Janet, and we were all hopin' he 'd get slipped up on again; but The himself seemed to side with the doctor, and Olaf took one long look, an' then shut his lips tight an' shook his head. The said he wanted to live, and had done all he could to get a clinch on life; but that it was slippin' away from him drop by drop, and he could n't stay with us much longer.

He seemed to want us about him, so we dropped in and sat beside him as long as we could keep cheerful. All through the afternoon he lay with a serious, gentle smile on his lips, but the sadness was mostly gone, even from his eyes. I closed my own eyes as I sat beside him, and called up the picture o' Badger-face the day he had wanted to lynch Olaf. Then I opened my eyes and looked at the real Promotheus, and I understood what the Friar meant by bein' born again.

I spoke o' this to ol' Tank Williams, and he fired up at me as though I had poured red pepper in the nose of a sleepin' cripple. "You 're a nice one, you are!" sez he. "I 'd sooner fill myself with alcohol and die in a stupor than to call up The's past at such a time as this. You ought to be ashamed o' yourself."

The' was no way to make Tank see what I meant so I sent him in to set with The a while, and took a little walk up the ravine. Every step I took brought some memory o' the time The and Horace and I had first started to find out about the woman; and it was n't long before I was ready to turn back.

Janet was quite strong by this time, though she still had to wear a bandage; and after supper, the Friar took her in to see Promotheus. He had told her all about him, and she

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was mighty sorry to think 'at his end was near. She did n't recall havin' been kind to him when he was playin' cripple; but the Friar had told her about this, too. Horace had told the Friar about what Ty had said, and it had cut him purty deep; but he had braced up better 'n we expected. We did n't any of us know what effect bringin' Janet in sight o' Ty would have, and when she came into the mess-hall, we watched purty close.

Ty sat propped up, with his clenched hand restin' outside the blanket, and an expression on his face like that of a trapped mountain-lion. He glared up at her as she came near; but she only looked at him with pity in her eyes, and she did n't seem to recognize him, at all — just looked at him as though he was a perfect stranger which she was sorry for, and Tank, who was settin' next me, gave me a nudge in my short ribs, which was about as delicate as though it had come from the hind foot of a mule. "Well?" I whispered. "What do ya mean by that?"

"Could n't ya see 'at she did n't know him?" sez Tank.

"That 's nothin'," sez I. "He knew her all right."

"Yes, but Great Scott," sez he, "a man can't claim that a woman 's his wife if she don't know him, can he?"

"Pshaw," sez I, "if you 'd settle things that way, the' would n't be any married people left. The' ain't one woman in fifty 'at knows her husband, and the' ain't any men at all who know their wives."

"You 're just dodgin' the question," sez Tank. "I claim that if a man marries a woman when she 's out of her mind, he ain't got any claim on her when she gets back into her mind again."

"Look here, Tank," sez I; "you 've never had much experience with the world, 'cause every time you went where

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experience was to be had, you got too intoxicated to take notice; but I 'm tellin' you the truth when I say that if women did n't sometimes get out o' their right minds, they would n't get married at all."

"Aw, shut up," sez Tank.

Janet had gone over to Promotheus, and was smoothin' his forehead. She had a beautiful, shapely hand, and it made me feel a little wishful to watch her. The lay perfectly still, and his sensations must 'a' been peculiar. Ty Jones did n't even look at 'em. He kept his brows scowled down and his gaze out the south window.

Presently Janet turned and walked out to the porch. It was an unusually warm night, and she sat there alone, while the Friar came back to The. Horace had gone off by himself to get a grip on his feelin's; but he came in about nine o'clock, and went up and took The's hand. "Well," sez he, "have you finally got over your nonsense? I have a lot o' plans I want to carry out, and you know I can't have you loafin' much longer."

Nothin' suited The so well as to have a little joke put at him; but he did n't have any come-back to this. He caught at his breath a time or two, and then said: "I can't do it, this time, Horace. I hate to disappoint ya — I 've been countin' on what a good time we were goin' to have — up there in the hills — but I can't come back this time — I, can't, quite, make it."

He ended with a little gurgle and sank back on the pillow. Horace shook him a little and then flew for the doctor, who was on the porch o' the old cabin. They were back in half a minute, Horace pushin' the doctor before him; and we all held our breaths when he felt The's pulse. The doctor squirted somethin' into The's arm, and after a bit, he opened

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his eyes with a long sigh, and when he saw Horace bendin' over him, he smiled.

"I mighty near slipped away that time," sez he. "It 's not goin' to be hard, Horace; and I don't want you to worry. I feel as comfortable as if I was sleepin' on a cloud, and there is n't one, single thing to grieve about. I 've been like one o' those hard little apples which take so long to ripen. I 've hung up on a high bough and the rains beat on me, and the sun shone on me, and the winds shook me about, and the birds pecked at me until at last just the right sort o' weather came along and I became softer and softer, and riper and riper, until now my hold on the stem begins to weaken. Purty soon a little gust 'll come along and shake me down on the green grass; but this is all right, this is perfectly natural, and I don't want you to feel bad about it.

"I own up now, that I 've been afraid o' death all my life; but this has passed. I don't suffer a bit; but I 'm tired, just that pleasant weariness a feller feels when his last pipe has been smoked, and the glow o' the camp fire begins to form those queer pictures, in which the doin's o' that day mingle with the doin's of other days. I 'm liable to drop off to sleep at any moment, now; and I 'd like — I 'd kind o' like to shake hands with the boys before I go."

Well, this gave Horace something to do, and he was mighty glad to do it. After we had all shaken hands with The, he marched up the prisoners, even to the Chink, and they all shook hands, too; and by this time Promotheus was purty tired; but he did look unusual contented. He glanced across at Ty; but Ty had turned his face to the wall, and The gave a little sigh, settled down into the pillow again, and closed his eyes. Horace backed around until The could n't see him, and shook his fist at Ty, good and earnest.

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Purty soon a regular grin came to The's face, and he opened his eyes and looked at the Friar with a twinkle in 'em. "Friar Tuck," sez he, "I don't know as I ever mentioned it before, but I 'll confess now that I 'm right glad I did n't lynch you for stealin' those hosses." He lay there smilin' a minute, and then held out his hand. "Good-bye, Horace," he said in a firm voice.

Horace had been doin' uncommon well up to now; but he could n't stand this. He threw himself on the bed, took both o' The's hands and looked down into his face. "Promotheus, Promotheus," he called to him in a shakin' voice. "Don't give up! You can win if you fight a while longer. Remember that day in the desert, when I wanted to lie down and end it all. You said you did n't take any stock in such nonsense; and you picked me up and carried me over the molten copper, while queer things came out o' the air and clutched at us. You reached the water-hole that time, Promotheus, and you can do it again, if you just use all your might."

Promotheus opened his eyes and his jagged, gnarly teeth showed in a smile, weak and trembly, but still game to the last line of it. "Nope," he said so low we could hardly hear him, "I 'm Promotheus, all right. I hung on as long as I could; but the vultures have finished my liver at last, Horace — they have finally finished it. I hate to leave you; but I 'll have to be goin' soon. The's only one thing I ask of ya — don't send a single one o' the boys to the pen. They don't know what the world really is; but shuttin' 'em out of it won't ever teach 'em. If the's anything you can do to give 'em a little start, it would be a mighty good thing — a mighty good thing." His voice was gettin' awful weak, an' he 'd have to rest every few words.

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"And Ty Jones, too," he went on, "Ty was square with me in the old days. Try to make him understand what it was 'at turned me again' him; and if the's any way to make things easier for Ty, I want you to have it done. Ty had a lot o' tough times, himself, before he turned all the hard part of his nature outside. Don't bear him any malice, Horace. Seventy times seven, the Friar sez we ought to forgive, and that many 'll last a long time, if a feller don't take offence too easy. The's a lot o' things I don't understand; but some way it seems to me that if I could just go out feelin' I had squared things with Ty, I 'd be a leetle mite easier in my mind."

Horace stepped to Ty's bed and shook him by the arm. "Did you hear what he said?" he demanded. "You know he 's achin' to have you speak to him decent. Why don't ya speak to him?"

Ty looked cold and stony into Horace's eyes, and then took his left hand and pushed Horace's grip from off his arm. Horace stood lookin' at Ty with his fist clinched. The turned and saw it and a troubled look came into his face.

"Friar Tuck," he said, "you meant it, did n't ya — that about forgivin' seventy times seven?"

"I did," sez the Friar, his voice ringin' out clear and strong in spite of its bein' low pitched. "Be at peace, Promotheus, the laws of man are at war with the laws of God; but they 're bound to lose in the end. I want you to know that I forgive Ty Jones as fully as you do — and I shall do everything in my power to square things up with him."

The held out his hand to the Friar, and they clasped in a comrade-grip. "I can trust you," he said; "and I know

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you 'll do all you can to make Horace see it that way, too."

"I forgive him, too, you big goose!" cried Horace. "I promise you that I 'll do all I can for him — on your account. Though I must say — but no, I mean it, Promotheus. I forgive him from my heart, and I 'll be as good a friend to him as I can."

"Now, let the little gust o' wind come," sez The. "I 'm perfectly ripe and ready for it, now."

The' was silence for several minutes; and then Promotheus said in a faint voice: "Friar, I wish you 'd sing to me. All my life I 've longed to hear a cradle-song, a regular baby cradle-song. I know it 's a damn-fool notion; but I never had it so strong as I 've got it now — and I wish you 'd sing one to me. My mother was a widow, mostly. She cleaned out offices at night to earn enough to keep us alive. She sacrificed her life for me, but I could n't understand this then.

"Night after night I used to creep in from the street through dirty, stinkin' halls, and cry myself to sleep. An achin' came into my heart then which has n't never quite left it; and it was this lonesomeness 'at finally made me run away — leavin' her to face it out — all by herself.

"My blood has turned to water, I reckon, and I feel like a baby to-night. I don't suffer, understand; I feel as though I was a little chap again, and that my mother did n't have to work; but was holdin' me on her lap. She did hold me that way once — the time the ambulance brought my old man home — but she could n't sing then. It seems to me that if you 'd just sing me a regular cradle-song — I could slip away into pleasant dreams."

The Friar cleared his throat a time or two before he

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found his voice; and then he said in a low tone: "I used to sleep in a store-box, Promotheus, when I was a lad — and I know exactly what you feel. I 'll sing you a cradle-song, a song for little children of all ages. It is a great privilege to be a little child, Promotheus, and — and I wish you pleasant dreams."

Then Friar Tuck drew a deep, full breath, and held it down until all the quiver had gone from his lips. When he started to sing, his voice was low an' soothin', and full o' tenderness; and after the first line, Promotheus gave a little sigh o' content, nodded his head, and shut his eyes.

The' was one tune we every last one of us liked. The Friar generally sang it to words which began: "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah"; and he usually sang it with a swing which was like a call to battle; and this time he sang the same tune, but soft and close and restful, and the words he used began: "Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me." These words sound purty flat when ya give 'em cold; but they did n't sound empty to us, as we stood lookin' down at Promotheus. All alone, he had taken his chance when he took on with Ty Jones; and now he was cashin' in this chance and it made us mighty sober.

The Friar finished the first four lines alone, and then the angels seemed to join in with him. We had all been purty certain that the' was n't nothin' in the shape of earthly melody fit to hold a candle to the Friar; but just at this point a new voice joined onto the Friar's which sent a thrill through us and made us stop breathin'. A queer, half frightened look crossed the Friar's face for a second; but his voice did n't waver for a single note. Instead, the' came a new tone of thanksgivin' and confidence in it which took

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all the sting out o' death and made it all right and pleasant, like the cool and restfulness o' night, after the heat of day.

"All this day Thy hand has led me,
And I thank Thee for Thy care;
Thou hast warmed me, clothed and fed me;
Listen to my evening prayer,"

went on the song and the' came an expression of wonder and of joy into The's tired face.

There are only three little verses to this one, and to fill out the tune they had to sing the first one over again, soft and low. The candles threw a soft glow on The's face which hid the pallor of it and the rough lines, but brought out all the kindly strength we had come to be so fond of; and when the music died away, we all sat still for fear o' disturbin' him.

Horace had been settin' holdin' one of his hands, and after a bit he leaned forward and whispered, "Was that what you wanted, Promotheus?"

But the' was n't any reply. The little gust o' wind had come with the song — and fully ripe, and soft to the core of his big, warm heart, Promotheus had loosed his hold on the bough of life, and dropped off onto the soft, deep grass of eternity.

"Promotheus! Promotheus!" cried Horace, and then covered his face with his hands and dropped forward upon The's quiet breast.

"Badger-face," called a harsh voice, and we looked at Ty Jones and saw him leanin' towards The. "Wait, Badger-face, wait — I want to speak to ya. I want to tell you that I lied to ya. Oh Lord, it 's too late, it 's too late!" And Ty Jones pressed his hand across his eyes and sank back.

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Horace whirled to tell Ty what he thought of him; but the Friar placed his big hand on Horace's shoulder, and pointed down to The's placid face. Horace gave a shudderin' sob, and settled back into his former position.

Janet Morris crossed the floor to the Friar just then and said to him in a low tone: "I have found it again — my voice has come back to me."

Ty Jones took his hand down from his eyes and straightened up and looked at her. All the eagle had gone from his face, and it looked old and haggard. "Don't you really know who I am?" he asked.

She looked at him and shook her head.

"I 'm your half-brother," he said. "I 'm Tyrell Jones Morris. Your mother might have been a good woman, but she was not good to me — she was n't fair; she prejudiced my father again' me. You were sellin' tickets at an elevated station in New York when I found you. You looked a good deal like your mother, for you were weak and sickly. I did n't know then, whether I brought you back with me because we had the same blood in our veins, or because I hated you — and I don't know yet. I 'm not tellin' you this now, because I care any thing for you, or the preacher; but Badger-face was square, and I know now 'at he 'd never have turned again' me if the rest of ya had n't tampered with him. I 'm sorry I did n't tell him before he died — and that 's why I 'm tellin' you now."

I winked my eyes to the boys, and we filed out and went over to the bunk-shack. We lighted our pipes and sat a long time smokin' in silence. One by one they dropped off to bed until only me and ol' Tank Williams was left. Tank sat with a sour look on his face, and so deeply buried in

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thought that the burnt matches around his stool looked like a wood pile. "What are ya thinkin' of, Tank?" I said to him.

"I 'm not kickin', understand," sez he; "but it does seem to me that when all The asked for was a cradle-song, the Friar could 'a' thought up somethin' besides another one o' those doggone sheep-herder hymns. The did n't have any more use for sheep-herders 'n I have."

This was the real Tank, all right. Once an idee took possession of him, it rode him rough shod till he keeled over with his tongue hangin' out.

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

THE FINAL MOVES

We buried The by the side o' Tim Simpson. Horace insisted on makin' a coffin for him — fact was, he wanted to have a regular funeral, but we talked him out o' this; so he made a coffin himself and lined it with silk which Ty Jones had brought out for Janet to make dresses of. The Friar held some short services, but he did n't sing or preach any. Some way, the' did n't seem to be any need of it. After we had covered him over we stood around talkin' for quite a while; and then only turned away because the first rain we had had for months came rattlin' down from the mountains.

"Do you see that, now?" asked ol' Tank after we had reached the porch and were sittin' watchin' it come down in torrents.

"I 'm not totally blind," sez I.

"Well, I 'm not superstitious," sez Tank; "but I 'm bettin' that he 's had that tended to, himself. He was n't one to forget his friends, and he knew 'at what we needed most was rain — so he 's called attention to it the first chance he 's had."

Fact was, Tank was so everlastin' superstitious that he spelt Tomas with an "h" in it to keep from havin' thirteen letters in his full name; but it did seem queer about this rain, because they was n't any sane man in the world who would have expected a rain just at this time. It 's astonishin'

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how many curious things there is if a feller just takes notice of 'em.

The Friar and Ty had had a long talk the night 'at Promotheus slipped away, and the Friar had agreed to settle down at the ranch and do what he could for Ty. Ty was n't thankful; but he had n't much choice, so he behaved better 'n any one would have expected. The Friar wanted me to stay and be foreman for him; but I told him I had promised Jabez to come back as soon as I had got a good holt on myself again; and I intended to leave for the Diamond Dot the minute things were right at the Cross brand. The Friar did n't much trust Pepper Kendal for foreman; but the minute I thought it over, I saw that Olaf was the very man, and this suited the Friar to a T.

We brought the prisoners up to Ty and he told 'em how things were and advised 'em to adjust themselves to new conditions as fast as possible, and they all agreed to do it and went to work under Olaf. The Friar knew a preacher at Laramie; so Horace gave Tillte Dutch the job o' goin' after him, and as soon as he came, the Friar and Janet were married, and then I made plans to hit the trail for the Diamond Dot.

Horace had made up his mind to build himself a cabin up at our old camp and he tried to hire me for life; but I had taken root at the Diamond, and when I explained things to him, he owned up I was right. I suggested to Horace that ol' Tank Williams was the very man for him, and he admitted, when he came to look it over, that Tank would suit him a heap better for hired help 'n I would. He even went so far as to say he never could understand how it came 'at a stiff-necked man like ol' Jabez could put up with my independent ways. I told Horace the' was a lot of things it

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was n't necessary for him to understand, and then I whistled to Tank, and he came over and joined us.

Tank rolled the notion about in his head a while, and then he sez: "Horace, I 'll take ya up. We both got cured up of our nerves on the same trip, and ever since then I have to own that you 've found favor in my sight; but the one thing 'at counts bigger 'n anything else, is the fact that, come what will, you 'll never have any more hankerin' to be pestered by a lot o' sheep, than I will."

Olaf started to get things ready for the round-up and us Diamond Dot boys, aside from ol' Tank, rode off home, where we found things in consid'able of a muddle. Durin' the three years previous I had been takin' more and more o' the responsibility onto my own shoulders, and ol' Cast Steel found himself purty rusty. We turned to and straightened things out, and then I settled down to the sober business o' handlin' a big outfit with a view on the future.

After this, I did n't do any more skitin' around than my peculiar nature seemed to insist on; but I did make out to pay the Cross brand a visit every once in a while. The Friar only intended to stay long enough to get things to slidin' easy; and then he and Janet were to go back East and work among the city poor; but the chance never came.

Janet grew perfectly strong and well again; but the city allus made her nervous to return to the mountains, and they were kept so busy on the ranch that the years slipped away without bein' noticed.

Ty's backbone was all in one piece, and solid — except where Olaf had unjointed it — and it took years to wear him down to friendliness; but when the Friar's first baby got big enough to creep, the contrary little cuss took more interest in ol' Ty Jones, than in airy other thing the' was

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on the place. I never saw any one yet who did n't feel flattered at a baby's endorsement — though why a baby should be supposed to actually have better judgment than grown folks has never been fully explained to me yet.

Horace kept his word to The, and he did all he could for Ty. Ty did n't like him and he did n't like Ty; but Ty was human, and it made him lonely to sit in one spot all the time, so that while he refused to be thankful, he gradually got to relyin' on Horace; and Horace was also human, and the more he did for Ty on The's account, the more fond he grew of Ty on his own account. He got him a wheel-chair first, and this was a big help. Then he fixed up a trapeze for Ty to practice on. Ty got mad about this and said that cripple though he was, no man could make a monkey of him; but one night when he could n't sleep he practiced on it, and it gave him a lot o' relief.

The name of the Chinaman was Yuen Yick, and he thought 'at Ty Jones was some sort of a god, and fair worshipped him — every one o' Ty's men swore by him, even after he turned decent. Ty used to abuse the Chink all he could and it pleased 'em both; and the Chink saw that Horace meant well by Ty, so he kept Horace posted on just what Ty did and thought; and Horace had Janet make some flannel bricks filled with cotton for Ty to throw at the Chinaman. Ty got a lot o' satisfaction out o' these bricks, and the exercise helped him too.

Next, Horace had a wide porch built all around Ty's house, and he swung ropes with rings on 'em from the ceiling, an equal distance apart; and Ty got so he could swing from ring to ring, and go all around the house, and climb ladders, and as the boy got big enough to become tyrannical, which was soon enough, goodness knows, he made Ty do all

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manner o' stunts — throw balls and juggle 'em, tell stories, draw pictures — Well, the fact was, that between 'em all, they kept Ty so active that first we knew, the devil had all been worked out of him and he was as civilized as any of us. One day when Horace was down visitin' him, he sent in the Chink and had him bring out a set of ivory figures, carved most beautiful and called chess-men; and he dared Horace to play him a game, and this was the final surrender of the old Ty Jones.

He was a well edicated man, Ty was; and each winter when he had left the ranch, he had gone to some big city where he had pertended to be a regular swell. No one ever found out just what had soured him so on the world, for his nature was to be sociable to a degree. He said that no one knew the cause of it except ol' Promotheus, and it was mightily to his credit that he had n't devulged the secret.

Ty strung out his surprises quite a while. It seems he was also an inventor, and had patents which brought him in a lot o' money. He had found this cave and had just widened it where widenin' was necessary, and had built his cabin above it. The floor was double and filled with earth, and the fake drawers were also filled with earth, so 'at no sound would show that it was hollow underneath. The drawers swung on a steel piller which could be worked from above by a rope which hung back o' his bookcase and from below by a lever.

It was a curious thing to see Ty Jones with his bristly eyebrows and his eagle's beak of a nose, makin' mechanical toys for the Friar's and Olaf's children. They did n't put any limit on what he was able to do, and he used to grumble at 'em as fierce as a grizzly — and then

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back-track like an Injun, and do whatever they wanted him to.

The Friar never quite gave up his plot to go back and work among the poor; but the' was allus so many things imposed upon him by the home folks that he was pestered with letters every time he left; and usually compromised by gatherin' up a bunch o' the poor as hasty as possible, and bringin' 'em back with him. His head was full of what he called welfare plans, and he settled the poor along all the likely cricks he found vacant, and bulldozed 'em into goin' to work. It 's a curious coincident; but most of 'em turned out well.

The' was a bilious feller out visitin' me once, which called himself a sosologist. I told him about some o' the Friar's projects; and he said that the Friar was nothin' but a rank Utopian, and that this sort o' work would never remove all the evils of the world.

"You can call him anything ya want to," sez I, "so long as it 's a word I don't understand; but the Friar 's not tryin' to remove all the evils in the world. He only removes those evils he can find by spendin' his whole life in huntin' for 'em; but he certainly does remove these ones in quick and able shape."

Another time, right after the Friar had brought about a settlement between some sheep and cattle men, a preacher dropped off to give his appetite a little exercise at the Diamond Dot. He belonged to the same herd that the Friar had cut out from, and I thought he would be interested; so I told him consid'able about the Friar. He was a most judicious-lookin' man, but baggy under the eyes and chi. He got all fussed up when I spoke well o' the Friar, and said he was un-co-nonical, said he was unorthodox — Oh, he

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cut loose and swore at the Friar in his own tongue 'til I about lost my temper.

" Look here," I sez to him, " it would take me some months to tell you all the good deeds the Friar has actually done; but I 'll just give you one single example. If I was to live up to my natural disposition, I 'd wring your neck, or shoot off your ears, or somethin' like that; but owin' to the Friar havin' taught me self-control, I 'm not even goin' to snap my fingers again' your blue nose. Make yourself perfectly at home here, and stay as long as the East can spare ya; but you 'll have to excuse me for a while, as the Friar has just written me an order to go over into the Basin to see what can be done for a young feller who has been arrested for hoss-stealin'."

Horace contributes liberally to the Friar's projects; but he don't take a hand in the game, himself — except with the imported poor which are gathered at the Cross brand, waitin' to be transplanted. Every year he seems to shrink about an eighth of an inch smaller, and get about that much tougher. He lights out for a trip now and again, and ol' Tank allus tags along, grumblin'. Tank thinks full as much of Horace as The did; but Tank 's a different proposition. The easier his lot is the more he grumbles; but I like nothin' better than to have a chat with him over old times.

One night I was up visitin' Horace, and after supper we got a little restless and started out for a walk. We sauntered down to our old look-out and stood gazin' down at the lights of the Cross brand ranch. Ty had rigged up a water power to manufacture e-lectricity, simply because the children had needed it to run some o' their idees, but the' was plenty of it to light the whole place. In token of Ty's brand, and also as a symbol of his own callin', the Friar had built

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an immense cross on the cliff just above the mouth of the ravine, and on the upright, and at each end o' the cross-piece were big electric lights. These could be seen for miles, and every one knew 'at whatever troubles they had, there was allus welcome, cheery hospitality, and sound advice waitin' for 'em in the shadow of this cross.

It was a moonlight night, one of those crisp, bright nights, when it makes a feller feel solemn just to get up high and look down at the beauty of the old, hard Earth. We had been talkin' o' the old days as usual; but not talkin' much, for we each saw the same set of pictures when we looked down from here, and they did n't need many words.

"Life is like a game o' chess," sez Horace. "The openin' is not so absolutely vital; but after a time the' comes one little move which is the keynote of all the balance of the game — and the same is true o' life. The way things has turned out down yonder seems to be the very best way they could have turned out; but it 's hard to look back and tell just what was the keynote of it all. Of course Promotheus — Promotheus was the prime mover; but then all the way along you can see the Friar's influence. What would you say was the keynote o' this tangled game, Happy?"

I looked down at Horace: he was wearin' a battered old hat, rough clothes and leggins, and smokin' a corncob pipe. "That 's an easy one," sez I, tryin' to shake off a feelin' o' sadness which was beginnin' to creep over me, in spite of all I could do; "gettin' your nerves cured up, Horace, was the keynote of it all."

"That was a long time ago," sez Horace, "a long, long time ago."

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